RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2 AMAZING NEW INFO

gamesTM

www.gamestm.co.uk

Xbox One | PS4 | Switch | PC | PS3 | Xbox 360 | Wii U | Virtual ... | 3DS | Retro

HANDHELD FOR THE HARDCORE?

NINTENDO'S MISSING LINK

CAN SWITCH FULFIL THE PROMISE OF THE WII U AND SAVE NINTENDO?

25 BEST GAMES OF 2016
How many have you played?

THE RISE OF HALO WARS 2

Exclusive intel from 343 and Creative Assembly

"I'VE NEVER MADE A TRIPLE-A GAME"

The legendary Suda51 talks Killer7, Shadow Of The Damned and more

HIGHLIGHTS

■ HORIZON: ZERO DAWN ■ MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA ■ GT SPORT ■ CIVILIZATION VI ■ BATTLEFIELD 1 ■ SNIPER ELITE 4 ■ PERSONA 5 ■ CALL OF DUTY: INFINITE WARFARE ■ FOOTBALL MANAGER 2017 ■ TITANFALL 2 ■ WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY ■ FOR HONOR



What actually is the difference between the Wii U and Switch? It's the question I've been batting around for a few weeks now, just trying to get the heart of why this new Nintendo machine feels so much more impressive and exciting than its predecessor. I'd like to hope by now we all appreciate that the Wii U has some of the best titles to have ever graced a Nintendo console, but there's no denying that it failed to set the world on fire.

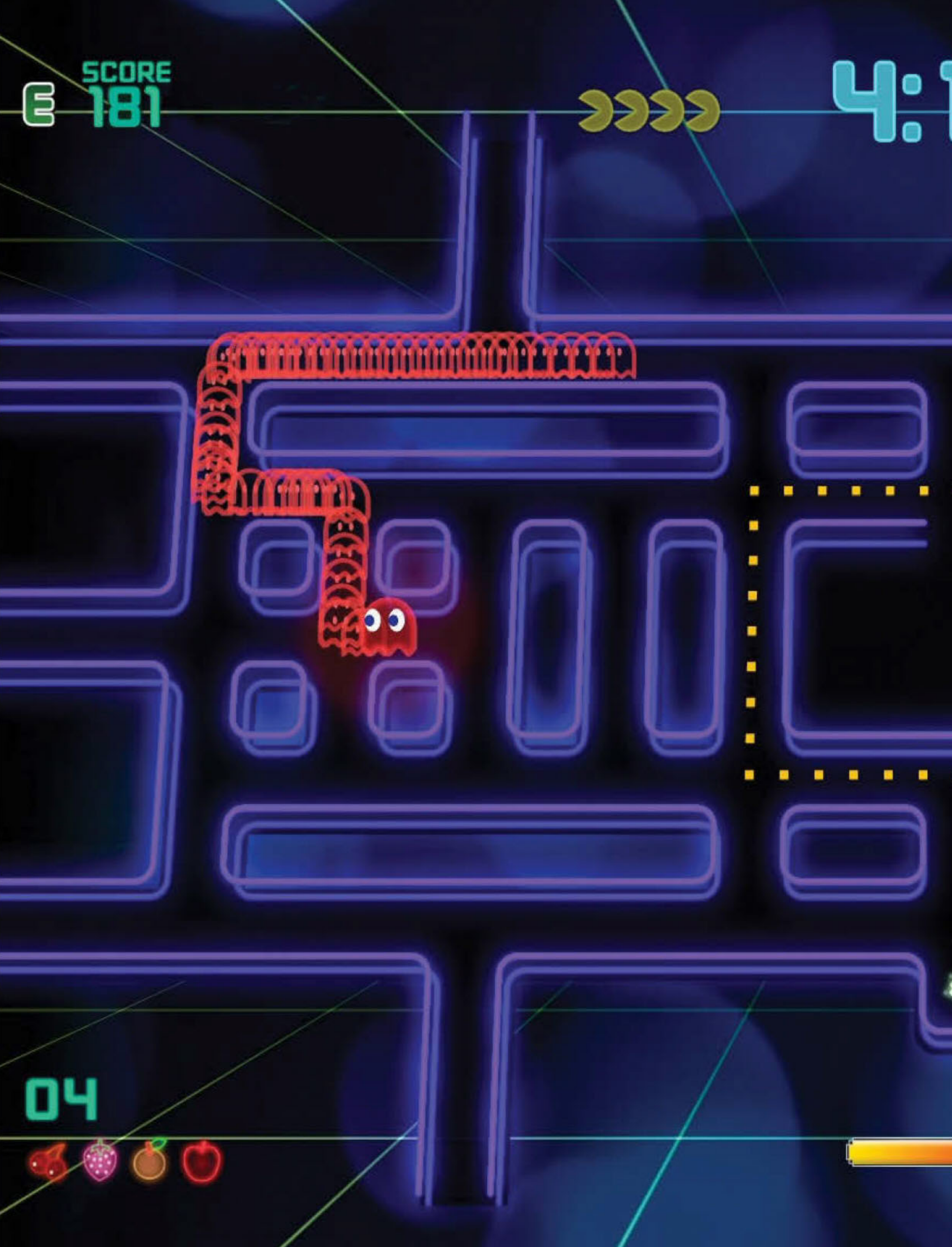
Perhaps one of the bigger differences, although it is a rather aesthetic one, is that the vision for Switch is much more clearly defined than it was when the Wii U was announced. We may be a little light on tech specifications, but we know that it's a console where the main processing power is housed within a device that features its own screen and as such can be played anywhere. It's a console and it's a handheld, and it's not looking to limit how you choose to use it.

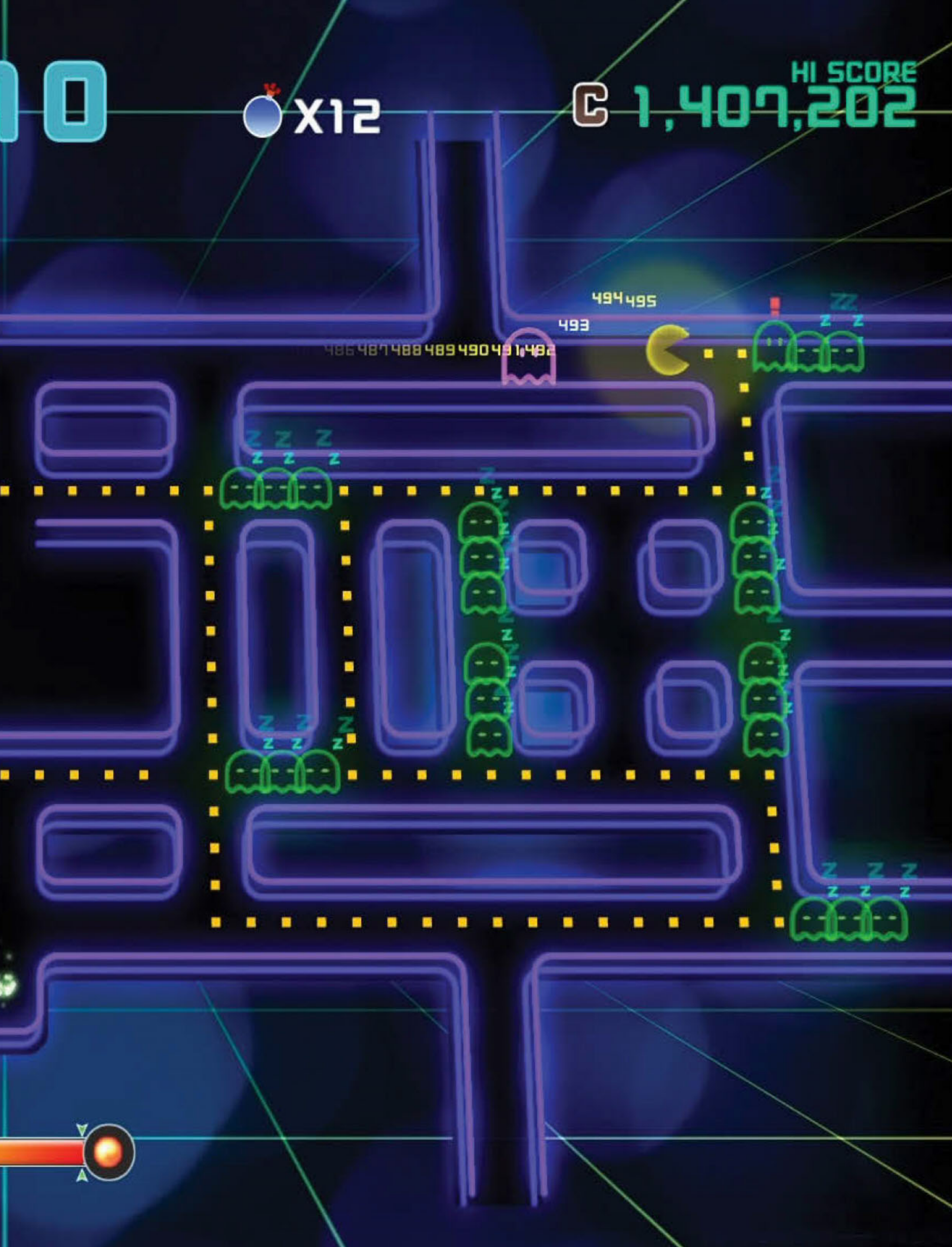
What's more, it is instantly a console that wants to encourage multiplayer and sharing the experience. That was something that the Wii U lacked by comparison to the Wii: an instant way to explain and share the unique new experience it had to offer. With Switch you'll be able to show off a brand-new *Mario Kart* and instantly hand someone the second Joy-Con to jump in and play. The Switch just makes sense, and that might be enough.

Jon Gordon

Jonathan Gordon
EDITOR

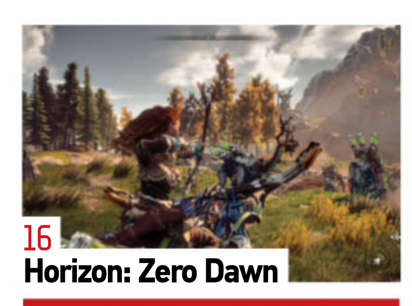



SCORE
181
04


X12
HI SCORE
1,407,202
494 495
493

Contents

www.gamestm.co.uk 181 | 16



16
Horizon: Zero Dawn

PREVIEWS

16 Horizon: Zero Dawn
18 Mass Effect Andromeda
20 For Honor
22 Gran Turismo Sport
24 Persona 5
26 Sniper Elite 4
28 Lost Ember
28 Maia
28 Code: Hardcore
28 Serial Cleaner
28 Nidhogg 2

DISCUSS

08 Everything we know about Red Dead Redemption 2
We fact-check the swirling rumours and speak with a western expert about Rockstar's historical accuracy

12 5 ways in which the Overwatch League is improving eSports
Blizzard has announced ambitious plans to turn pro gaming into something you can really root for





38
Halo Wars 2

FEATURES

30 Nintendo's missing Link
How Nintendo Switch is putting the power of triple-A gaming in the palm of your hand

38 Halo Wars 2
343 Industries and Creative Assembly combine to tell us how they are reinventing strategy gaming

46 Past, present and Suda51
The legendary game-maker reflects on his creations and talks about what drives him to make more games

52 20 years of Tomb Raider
We sit down with a few of the many creators who helped to launch and sustain Lara Croft for two decades

58 The games of the year
games™ selects its 25 must-play titles of 2016 that will also be remembered for years to come



72
Titanfall 2

REVIEWS

70 Battlefield 1
72 Titanfall 2
74 Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare
76 Civilization VI
78 Shadow Warrior 2
80 Dragon Quest Builder
81 Football Manager 2017
82 World Of Final Fantasy
83 Skylanders Imaginators
84 Manual Samuel
84 Maximum Car



52
Tomb Raider

FAVOURITES

14 Why I Love… Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga
Nolan North, voice actor

86 Why I Love… World Of Warcraft
David Pellas, studio director, Raven Software

110 The Vault
games™ sifts through the myriad accessories and add-ons the industry offers so you don't have to



96
Rogue Leader

RETRO

90 The Retro Guide To Amstrad
It couldn't compete with the big boys, but its games lineup was still something to envy. How many of these greats did you play?

96 Behind the scenes of Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader
A visual powerhouse on the GameCube, we take a closer look at its creation with the team that made it

102 Retro Interview: Soren Johnson
The story of *Civilization* isn't only about Sid Meier. We have a chat with another key architect of the series' success

106 Game Changers: Donkey Kong Country
A milestone moment for Rare, a revolution in graphics for 16-bit consoles and the game that resurrected an iconic hero

> Have your say on anything videogame related at **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum** and you could feature in **games™**

facebook.com/gamesTM @gamesTMmag www.gamestm.co.uk



Turn to page 66

30 Feature

NINTENDO SWITCH

We break down Nvidia's tech, chat with developers and reveal the launch games you can expect from this hybrid machine

FRONTIER FACT-CHECKING

Everything we know about Red Dead Redemption 2

→ Rockstar is bringing us its first game built for this generation of consoles and it's a welcome return to America's old west, but what secrets does its announcement reveal?

Like a posse of gunslingers for hire fresh from a victory over an oppressive landowner who is squashing the creativity and freedom of the townsfolk, Rockstar is riding to the rescue, bringing its unique brand of open-world heroics and violence to our current generation. Or perhaps that's just how the *GTA* developer thinks of itself in such situations, we really don't know. What we do know is that *Red Dead Redemption 2* is launching in the Autumn of 2017 and we've had our first glimpse of what this third game in the *Red Dead* series will be offering. It was brief, it was powerful and it offered a lot of insight (along with some art and a press statement from Rockstar) into what this new western tale was going to offer us.

For a start it was wonderfully refreshing to see the glorious open vistas that made *Red Dead Redemption* such a treat to play back in 2010. The closest we've probably seen to this approach of prairie land, mountains, forests and small towns was *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*. *Grand Theft Auto V* touched on it a little in its northern portion of the map, but there has been nothing quite like New Austin, West Elizabeth, and Nuevo Paraiso. Exploring the wilderness, watching the Sun set over a vast horizon; it really was something very special and *Red Dead Redemption 2* teases plenty of that great stuff.

Perhaps the most evocative shot is of a camp fire in a forested area under a star-lit sky. The full colour and form of the Milky Way can be seen above the trees. It speaks to a game that is fully embracing it reverence for an America without industrialisation, without modernity and to some extent without civilisation, which are elements at the heart



"Developed by the creators of Grand Theft Auto V and Red Dead Redemption, Red Dead Redemption 2 is an epic tale of life in America's unforgiving heartland."
Rockstar, press release

DATA STREAM → HITMAN DEVELOPER IO HAS CONFIRMED A SECOND SEASON FOR ITS EPISODIC REBOOT



For daily news updates and exclusive interviews

 facebook.com/gamesTM

 @gamesTMmag

www.gamestm.co.uk



Above The environment stands out above all else in the new *Red Dead Redemption 2* trailer, showing some of the most detailed vistas Rockstar has ever put together.

Above The sight of a canoe has us all hoping that we might finally be able to swim in *Red Dead Redemption 2*. It was an annoyance in the last game that could be easily fixed.



of the Western mythos. While these themes chased people from the East to the Western Frontier, living without modern comforts and living by your wits is really what we're all looking forward to when we think about a *Red Dead* game.

While pinpointing a time period and with it a place in the timeline for this game is rather challenging, there are a number of clues in the materials released so far that direct us strongly to believe that this will be a prequel to *Red Dead Redemption*, sitting some ten to 15 years prior to the events of that game and about the same distance from those of the original release *Red Dead Revolver*, which took place sometime in the 1880s. A general absence of electricity save for a few street lights, the fresh look of many buildings compared to those in the first *Redemption* and the presence of Bison in abundance appear to be strong indicators.

MARK HAMILL AND BILLY DEE WILLIAMS HAVE JOINED THE VOICE CAST FOR PS4 EXCLUSIVE LET IT DIE



Above This scene with the vultures is nasty, but it speaks to the brutal world that we're going to be entering into in late 2017.

If you're not familiar with the previous game and the history of the American West, Bison were driven near to extinction at the turn of the century and there was an achievement in *RDR* for killing the last of the bovine stock. That we see so many walking alongside a train is a cheeky nod to an earlier era before the promise of achievements and trophies drove John Marston to slaughter them all.

Marston's return is also heavily hinted by what appears to be his presence as the furthest left character in the announcement artwork for the game. Also present and largely recognisable in the gang are Dutch van der Linde, third in from the left, and Bill Williamson, third in from the right. It has been suggested that the others could be characters from *Revolver*, tying the first two games together in a more concrete way. The second from the left could be an older Jack Swift, the second in from the right could be original protagonist Red Harlow, and on the far right might be Native American Shadow Wolf. All speculation at this point, but an interesting lineup to consider.

What might be slightly more safe to predict is that the game will play heavily into the history of Dutch van der Linde's gang whose backstory we got to hear a little through John Marston. It seems likely that this could cover the events leading up to and following Marston being shot and left for dead by his brothers in arms in 1906. It also seems likely, as the artwork released hints and given Rockstar's own history in this area, that we'll be playing largely if not entirely as a new character to the series. The man in the centre of the art carries no identifiable clothing, weapons or marks that make him stand out as someone from a previous release. And in the *GTA* series and *Red Dead* titles so far, while there is often crossover and referencing to previous games, the lead is usually someone new with whom we can learn about the world around us.

And what a world it promises to be. While the announcement trailer is only a minute long it shows a grand diversity of landscapes and wildlife already. Rockstar has stated that this game takes place in the American Heartland, which would typically mean the states that do not touch an ocean or the Midwestern states, which would place RDR2 a little further North and East of its previous location in a fictionalised Texas and New Mexico. That would also put it in touch with some larger settlements and towns, perhaps some more complex and numerous train networks, which in turn promises the possibility of significant train heists and maybe even a few banks we could go and rob.

The wider world also seems to be full of intrigue with animals roaming and interacting in the trailer with great abandon. Mice can be seen wandering in corn fields, some creatures appear to attack one another in the forest, birds soar through the evening sky and there's

> "The game's vast and atmospheric world will also provide the foundation for a brand new online multiplayer experience."
> Rockstar, press release

DATA STREAM → BACKWARDS COMPATIBLE 360 GAMES WILL WORK ON PROJECT SCORPIO SAYS XBOX



Inset These oil fields immediately get us thinking of *There Will Be Blood*, a likely cinematic reference for Rockstar if ever we've heard one. It was a brutal depiction of frontier life and politics.

the unforgettable scene of vultures picking apart a coyote as a dog barks and watches on. It's a scene of death, decay and opportunism that rather nicely summarises the brutality of the old West. Whether or not all this wildlife hints at a return to the hunting and crafting subsystems of the last game we'll leave for you to ponder, but it does seem rather likely. Crafting has become such a mainstay of modern sandbox games that it makes sense that some further expansion in this area would be seen as desirable.

So, what we appear to have is a bigger, prettier take on the Western Frontier, likely to be a prequel to *Red Dead Redemption*, possibly even giving us some background on the Dutch gang and maybe even linking up *Redemption* and *Revolver* with crossover characters from both. Beyond that the registration of a *Red Dead Online* web domain hints at an expansion of the online portion of the game similar to what we've seen from *GTA Online*. The MMO-like experience has not ceased putting out content since its launch in 2013. It's given *GTA V* longevity that few sandbox titles can boast. Something similar for *RDR2* seems like a good call to us.

Cowboy Talk

→ We discuss the historical accuracy of Red Dead Redemption 2 with John Mack Faragher, professor of history and American studies at Yale University

Rockstar loves its cinematic references. To your mind are there certain movies that depict the Western Frontier more accurately than others?

Well, we're talking about different kinds of depictions rather than history, but my own preferences go to where there was a little scene in the trailer where a guy is standing there and there's a carcass in the foreground and vultures pecking at the carcass. In the Seventies that was what was known as the blood and rags approach to the verisimilitude or mise-en-scène of the films. Tattered clothing and a disordered background as opposed to the classic Westerns, which are set in a kind of pristine, unrealistically clean kind of environment and it went the other way with the Italian Spaghetti Westerns and all the American versions that followed. I think that *Deadwood* took that approach and I think that's a much more preferable approach if only because it's grittier and although it's a depiction of reality, it's much closer to the reality.

In your new book, Eternity Street, you talk about how codes of honour and vengeance rule when there's an absence of authority, which reminded us a lot of Rockstar's themes in these games. Can you tell us more about he history of that?

In this world, the world of the frontier… authority was very weak, if present at all, so in Southern California you've got two or three counties at the time, so three county sheriffs with perhaps a couple of deputies a piece and that's pretty much the extent of law enforcement. Maybe town marshals, but these people, including sheriffs, are actually more interested in tax collection and assessing fines because for the most part they receive their own compensation as a cut of fines for taxes they collect. Their attention not really directed toward law enforcement except in extremis.

In that kind of circumstance where there is very weak law enforcement, a very weak justice system, people who hunger for justice take it upon themselves. You have the DIY, do it yourself kind of justice, what I call in the book Outlaw Justice as opposed to legal justice. Of course, Outlaw Justice quickly devolves into vendetta, feud, honour killing, gang violence (otherwise known as vigilantism). Those become the primary mode of the attempt to achieve justice.

That kind of Outlaw Justice is toxic. It prevents the establishment and growth of legal institutions of justice. Vigilantes are frequently breaking into jails and taking guys out and hanging them because they are convinced that there can be no justice under the law, that the law is not strong enough to enact justice. It's a vicious cycle.

Red Dead Redemption deals with a lot of characters trying to hold on to old west values and rejecting technology and federal government. Was this true to the time?

I don't know if this is an extension that plays into the game or not, but in reality this world that they're defending is a traditional world. It's also the world of slavery of Indian-hating, of dispossession of native peoples, so aggrandisement, squatting, stealing land, and hostility to federal authority. These things are still true today, you know. The proclivity to go armed, that of course is something that doesn't go all the way back in American history to the Eighteenth century, actually. I think the arming of America and particularly the frontier and countryside is something that happens in the wake of the Mexican War and the Civil War.

Would it have been unusual to see outlaw gangs with members from different ethnic backgrounds such as Mexicans or Native Americans?

No, not necessarily because of the diversity of the population in general, that is to say that there are plenty of native people and plenty of Latinos. By and large native people hang out with native people, Latinos hang out with Latinos and whites hang out with whites, but there's enough of everybody and enough diversity among them that plenty of Latino gangs would have the odd white guy and vice versa. Any of these combinations is plausible.

It's not clear yet if women will be a part of the gangs in Red Dead Redemption 2, but would that have been unusual in outlaw gangs to have female members as well as male?

It was unusual, but not unknown. I have records of the capture of gangs that include women. In fact not only did they include women, but women would get strung up along with the others. And I have also accounts of women who participated in battles between vigilantes and sheriffs posses and outlaw gangs. Women who were in the outlaw gangs who were riding along with them and firing their revolvers just like the other guys.

John Mack Faragher's latest book, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles*, is available now from Amazon and all good book stores worldwide



TURTLE ROCK HAS RELEASED THE FINAL, UNFINISHED LEFT 4 DEAD MAP, CALLED DAM IT, FOR FREE



SING WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

5 ways the Overwatch League is improving eSports

→ Blizzard has revealed its plans for a dedicated new league system for its hugely popular shooter



A REASON TO ROOT

1 For fans trying to get into eSports, one of the tougher challenges can be coming up with a reason to support a particular team over another. Being a fan of the game itself is fine on its own, but being able to really root for a side in competition makes everything more exciting. The Overwatch League plans to have teams based in major cities around the world, giving you a local reason to pick one team over another and to stick with that team regardless of who plays for them.



REGIONAL PLAY

2 As an extension of there being city-based teams, the Overwatch League will feature locally held LAN matches as part of league play in front of live audiences. That means that big competitive events will be taking place around North America, Europe and Southeast Asia. It's a big break away from the dominant team model, which is all rather concentrated around two or three major cities, like Los Angeles for a lot of US teams. This may in turn mean we'll see some brand new franchises begin or more local sports teams expand into eSports.



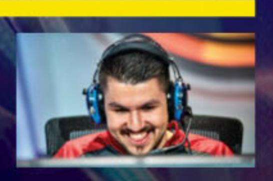
GLOBAL EXPANSION

3 Blizzard has set out its plans for regional leagues allowing different cities in each region to compete against each other, but the long-term plan is for the best teams from the USA, Europe, South Korea and beyond to play each other for a world title. This is much closer to something like a football league model where the best teams in each European league compete together for the Champions League. Blizzard has said this will depend on interest globally so it may be a slow build-up to that level of international competition.



OPEN TRIALS

4 Another key element to Blizzard's approach is not to lean on preexisting pro teams or player bases. The preseason for the Overwatch League will begin with a Combine, a term used a lot in American sports that basically means a try-out system where players of any background can compete in front of potential team managers and vie for places on the new *Overwatch* teams. Established players will likely be the first to be snapped up, but if you fancy your chances, there shouldn't be anything standing in your way of getting picked.



PLAYER CONTRACTS

5 As we've discussed in **games™** previously, one of the big concerns around eSports broadly is player treatment and working conditions. It's been a growing problem and something that has opened up potential for illicit gambling and exploitation of players. Blizzard wants none of that in this league so it is guaranteeing team places in the league once teams are confirmed, meaning they won't just disappear, leaving players and fans in the lurch after the season, and it is promising player contracts up front with predetermined benefits. That should give pro players a lot more security.

DATA STREAM → RAINBOW SIX SIEGE WILL GET A SECOND SEASON OF UPDATES, UBISOFT HAS CONFIRMED


0



WHY I ♥...

LEGO STAR WARS: THE COMPLETE SAGA

NOLAN NORTH, VOICE ACTOR

“*I’m going to go all dad on you here, because one game series that I always enjoyed playing were the* Lego *games. You know,* Lego Star Wars *and* Lego Indiana Jones, *because I played with my sons. Whether it’s the music, just jumping around, looking for things or collecting coins… it doesn’t matter, because I got to play them with my sons and see it through their eyes, I think that’s the reason they are some of my favourites. I’ve actually gotten to voice a couple of characters in the games too, [though] that’s mostly been in the* Lego Batman *series… but they weren’t into* Batman *as much as they were* Star Wars *or* Indiana Jones *so I’ve never played that one with them, I’ve never played any of the* Lego *games I worked on with them! But man, that* Lego Star Wars, *we just played a lot of that together.*”

“I got to play them with my sons and see it through their eyes, I think that’s the reason they are some of my favourites”
NOLAN NORTH, VOICE ACTOR

1

2

3

4

KNOW YOUR MOVES

1 MOUNT UP

SOME CREATURES CAN have their software 'overridden' by Aloy and then used as a means for faster map traversal, or can be used to aid assaults against larger packs.

2 DEAD EYE

ALOY IS A master archer, able to take aim under pressure and disable towering enemies with deft precision. The bow can be upgraded with resources that are looted from enemies, dead or alive.

3 ATTACK PATTERNS

VARYING YOUR PLAN of attack is the best way to survive. The enemy AI routines are varied, meaning you'll need to be prepared to change your plans in an instant.

4 HEIGHT ADVANTAGE

MOST CREATURES ARE much bigger than Aloy, which means you'll need to be aware of environmental objects to climb in an effort to get the drop on enemies before combat kicks off.

Some enemies are too tough to kill, though you're able to disable them long enough to grab the loot off of their backs and escape.

Horizon: Zero Dawn

CONCEPT *Horizon: Zero Dawn* picks up 1,000 years after a post-apocalyptic event, with Aloy venturing out of her settlement and into foreboding outback territory to find a world ravaged by technology.

Can Guerrilla deliver where it truly counts?

It's easy to approach Horizon: Zero Dawn with a healthy dose of scepticism. Guerrilla Games is known for its beautifully linear worlds and mechanically tight (but systemically light) first-person shooters, an open-world RPG always seemed like it would be a bit of a stretch. Getting hands-on with the studio's beastly new action-adventure doesn't quite alleviate these fears entirely, though it has certainly done enough to get the senses tingling.

Within minutes we are drawing heavily for breath, such is the impact of stepping foot into this familiar but obviously foreign world. It's honestly stunning – even as a nagging voice in the back of our head has concerns over what there will be to actually do and see in the huge playable space, we still can't quite get over how gorgeous it all looks. The dynamic lighting and weather system is unlike anything else we've seen this generation, the texture details and particle effects are equally impressive; say what you will about Guerrilla, but it sure knows its way around a game engine.

The undergrowth of the sprawling lush foliage is Aloy's playground, with stealth the best defence against the towering mechanical dinosaurs that have overrun the land. Peaceful coexistence is non-existent by the time we find ourselves facing these creatures – known only as 'Machines' – as a corruption runs deeply through their systems, turning the once docile robots into dangerous predators.

Tools to survive, let alone fight the Machines with, are limited, with Aloy existing, essentially, as a cavewoman trapped in a strange sci-fi world. The Machines need to be conquered for components such as metal and electricity, resources that are looted from corpses and can be used for crafting integral items. These range from offensive traps, such as the Tripwire (which stuns Machines with an electric wave) or ammo for your Ropecaster (which, enjoyably, bolts enemies to the ground), to armour piercing, electrical and explosive ammunition for your compound bow.

You'll need to make use of these limited items in tandem with stealth to have any chance of taking the creatures down, especially as many of them move in packs overseen by Watchers. A focus on these sentry Machines takes priority, because, should you alert one before you can clamp it down and disassemble its mouth with your knife, you'll find a herd of robosaurs quickly blowing smoke down your neck.

Many open-world games, such as those in the *Assassin's Creed* series, often struggle to integrate stealth tactics into the wider ecosystem, but *Horizon* has no such problems. Aloy naturally ducks into stealth as soon as you find yourself in tall grass – not unlike similar systems found in *Uncharted 4* – and it makes navigating the world feel very intuitive. It gives you scope and opportunity to plan attacks, set traps and unleash hell on an unsuspecting enemy in a very natural and enjoyable fashion – many games have promised to deliver this style of guerrilla warfare, though very few have delivered it this convincingly.

It also helps that Aloy moves swiftly about the world while in combat, dipping and rolling around attacks and bounding across the environment while preparing nimble arrow assaults or melee combos. Combat is thrilling, if not exhilarating, although it's difficult to know how well the studio will be able to maintain that momentum before falling into the familiar pitfalls that plague the open-world games of the modern generation.

> "The foundation of combat in Horizon: Zero Dawn is built upon the speed and cunning of Aloy versus the raw strength and size of the machines"
>
> PRESS RELEASE GUERRILLA GAMES

With Guerrilla keeping quiet on story and the wider game direction outside of these enjoyable vertical slices, there's still plenty of time for this gorgeous world and its killer combat to be overshadowed by familiar quest-design monotony. Every studio seems to be eager to launch into the realms of huge open-worlds, yet very few have exhibited the skills to make them engaging for the multiple hours of gameplay these games require. Due to this, the jury's still out on whether Guerrilla has what it takes to make this game as beautiful on the inside as it is on the out.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4
Origin: Netherlands
Publisher: Sony Interactive Entertainment
Developer: Guerrilla Games
Release: 3 March 2017
Players: 1

Developer Profile

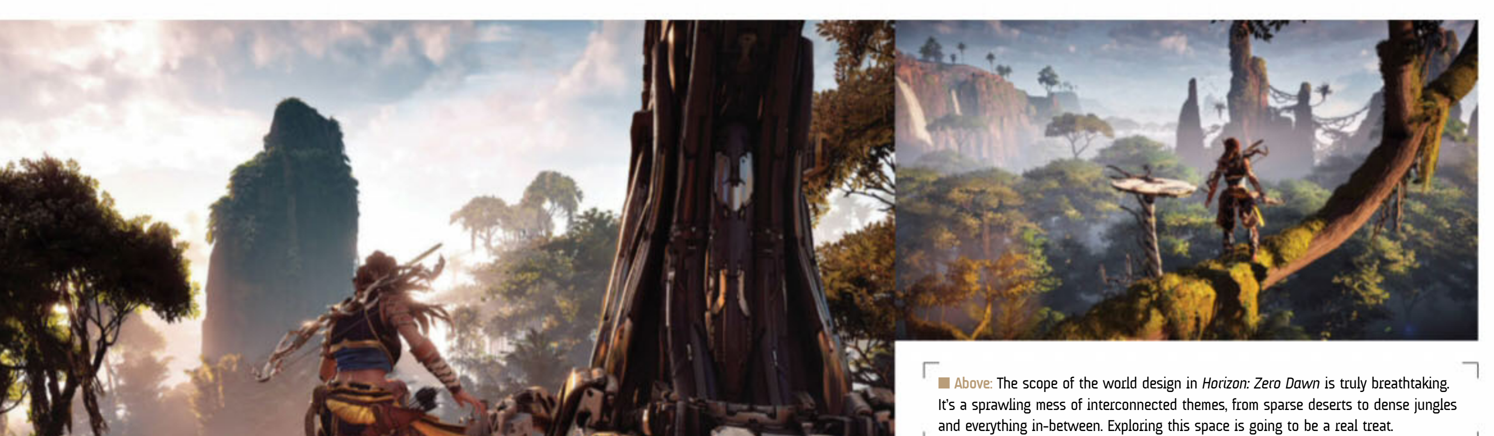
Founded in 2000, Guerrilla Games is best known for its work on PlayStation exclusive *Killzone*. Touted as Sony's answer to Bungie and *Halo*, *Killzone* would be used a technical showcase for three generations of hardware and, later, a proving ground for Sony's ever-evolving online systems.

Developer History

Killzone **2004 [PS2]**
Killzone 2 **2009 [PS3]**
Killzone 3 **2011 [PS3]**
Killzone: Shadow Fall **2013 [PS4]**

High Point

Killzone: Shadow Fall was not only a fantastic FPS that increased the scope and depth of Guerrilla's tentpole franchise – it also highlighted the power and potential of the PlayStation 4 at launch.



Above: The scope of the world design in *Horizon: Zero Dawn* is truly breathtaking. It's a sprawling mess of interconnected themes, from sparse deserts to dense jungles and everything in-between. Exploring this space is going to be a real treat.

Mass Effect Andromeda

CONCEPT ■ A third-person shooter and action-RPG mashup set in a grand open-world-style universe full of worlds to explore and relationships to pursue.

Bioware has a ticket to Ryder

While 2016 has been pretty heavy on virtual science fiction worlds, be they VR dogfighters or procedurally generated darlings scuttled by the hype, one franchise has been waiting in the deep dark of space, biding its time to remind the pretenders that there's only one true king of science fiction in gaming.

So with almost five years of absence on the clock, where is *Mass Effect* taking us next? Thanks to some new details released for N7 Day we know that the action-RPG series isn't being rebooted but instead we're getting a new story set in a fresh galaxy far from the ones we explored with Shepard and the crew of the Normandy. We're now travelling on board a new Normandy-esque craft, the Tempest, in a new timeline that is set 600 years after of the original. Bioware has been characteristically coy on clarifying those narrative details, but it's clear that the Canadian studio wants *Andromeda* to feel like a total refresh in both location and timescale, as well as deftly dodging the repercussions of the original trilogy.

With Shepard somewhat indisposed, the main character role now falls to Sara and Scott Ryder, a pair of young siblings who were travelling aboard the Hyperion, one of four arks sent out by humanity and three other species to set up colonies in the distant Andromeda system. When Hyperion becomes separated from the other arks and runs afoul of a new mysterious enemy known as the Kett, whichever Ryder you choose will assume the fancy sounding role of 'Pathfinder', and it's up to you to establish a foothold in a new galaxy far from the Milky Way.

With that new setting comes plenty of new changes as Bioware transforms the systems of *Mass Effect* like never before. This being an *ME* built from the ground up for current-gen tech, *Andromeda* will be the first entry in the series to go open-world (or is that 'open-galaxy'?). In order to avoid the loading screens of the *ME* of old, the necessary data will be loaded and generated in real-time while you roam the Tempest, creating a seamless transition between one solar system and the next.

Loyalty missions, a feature that was sorely missed in the all-out war of *ME3* and one that made *ME2* so poignantly personal, are returning but they won't be tied to the main storyline in the way that they were with *ME2*'s suicide mission. It's a brave move on the part of Bioware, but it could also make for a far more personable experience as you forge countless new relationships. It's even dropping the light and dark of the Paragon/Renegade morality system to make its universe seem less black and white.

The renovations don't stop there either – the class system from the previous game is also being thrown on the galactic scrapheap. Instead there will be a wider, over-arching skill tree you can pick and choose from depending on how you play. You'll also be able to undo and reassign those skills, a la *Kingdoms Of Amalur: Reckoning*, although Bioware is keeping tight lipped as to why you have the power. Well, you are the Pathfinder, after all.

The mining mini-game of *ME2* is gone, with the planetary exploration of *ME1* back in with a new vehicle taking over from the Mako (check out 'Goodbye Mako, hello Nomad'). Planets can be explored from their surface to their underbelly, and there will even be optional 'super bosses' that you can return to if you stumble across one without a high enough amount of experience. There's even a new crafting mechanic that enables you to build new armour and weapons from blueprints discovered while exploring.

If you're still hoping to roam the Andromeda galaxy for a quick roll in the sheets, romantic options will be there, but not every relationship will be romantic and not every potential suitor fall for you instantly. Those 'sexy' cutscenes from the previous games were awkward on a cellular level, so we're pleased to see Bioware infusing things with more of an adult flavour. In fact, with its release mere months away, the Andromeda galaxy is sounding more and more like a place we want to visit.

> "One of our biggest ambitions is to give players an unprecedented level of freedom for a ME experience – where you'll go, how you'll get there and how you'll play"
>
> AARON FLYNN BIOWARE

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4/Xbox One/PC
Origin: Canada
Publisher: EA
Developer: Bioware
Release: Spring 2017
Players: 1+ (multiplayer confirmed)

Developer Profile

Established way back when in 1995, Bioware has been a powerhouse in role-playing games ever since the brilliant *Baldur's Gate* arrived in 1998. Its back catalogue reads like a genre best of, including *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, the *Dragon Age* series and the *Mass Effect* trilogy.

Developer History

Baldur's Gate **PC [1998]**
Neverwinter Nights **PC [2002]**
Jade Empire **PC, Xbox [2005]**
Star Wars: The Old Republic **PC [2011]**

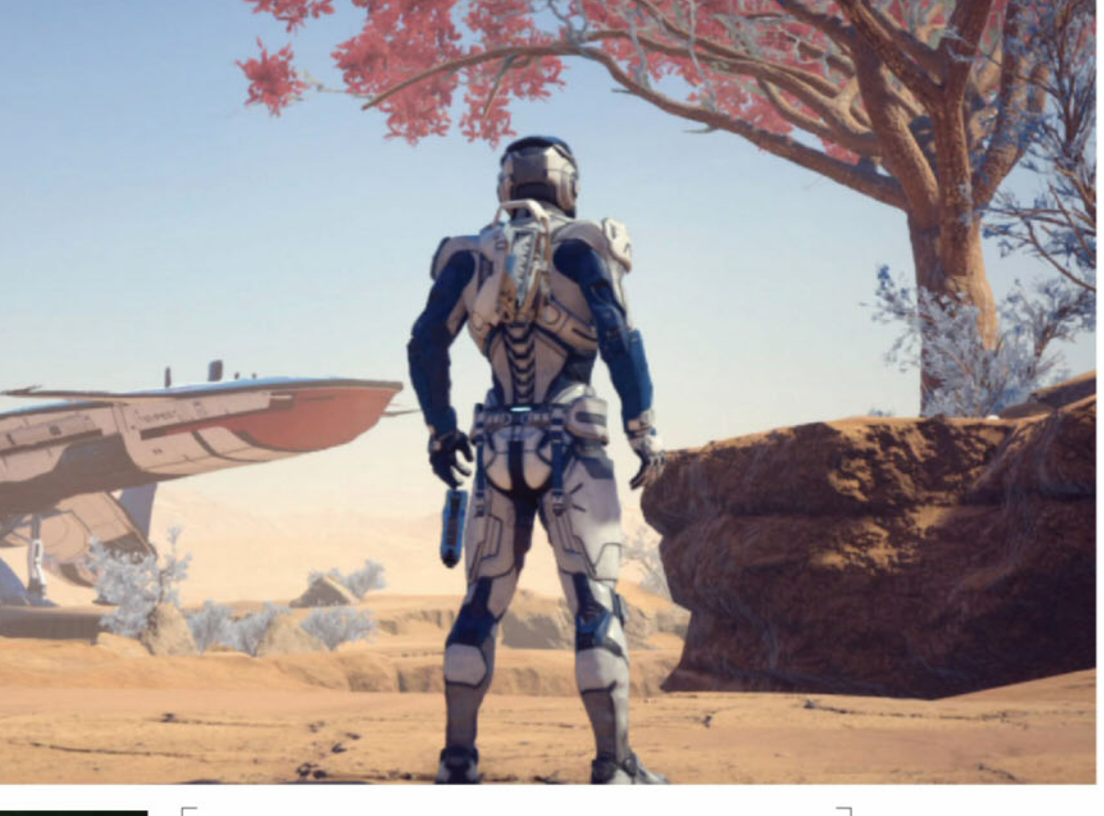
High Point

While the whimsical fantasy of *Dragon Age: Origins* comes close, few games have left as big an impact of a genre than the epic drama of *Mass Effect 2*.





■ Right: While it's yet to divulge too many details, Bioware has confirmed that multiplayer will return in *Mass Effect* and that playing it will have a positive effect on your progression through the main game. We're very curious to see how this plays out.

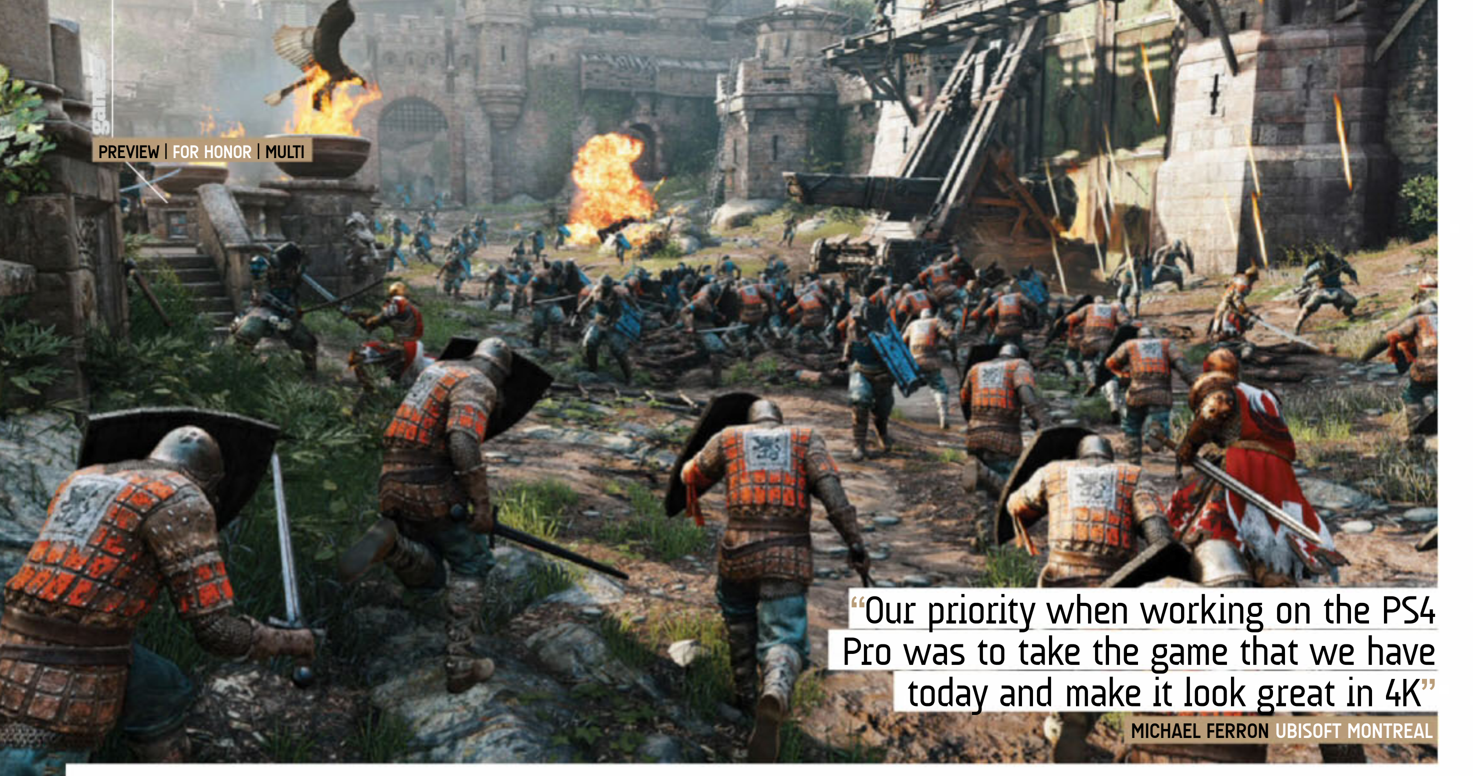


■ Left: The dialogue choices in Andromeda will have four options – Head, Heart, Professional and Casual – while the good/bad metre has been removed completely. Below: The cover system in Andromeda has been given an update, with a more dynamic version now in place similar to the one used in *The Last Of Us*.

GOODBYE MAKO, HELLO NOMAD

The original M35 Mako was something of a divisive feature in *Mass Effect*, so it wasn't surprising to see it dropped in favour of *ME2*'s calming mining mini-game. What with the advances in console tech since *ME3*, Bioware is now bringing the buggy back and enabling you to explore planets in real-time – although now you'll be clocking up the miles in your new vehicle, the Nomad.

Bioware says the Nomad will be a big step up from Mako, as well as appearing in one of the game's pricier collector's editions in remote control form. Considering the Mako was controlled like a tank, any sort of improvement to a feature that's been missing for two games is a plus in our eyes.



"Our priority when working on the PS4 Pro was to take the game that we have today and make it look great in 4K"
MICHAEL FERRON UBISOFT MONTREAL

■ Above: One of the more interesting long-term results of *For Honor* will be how Vikings, knights and samurai offer different play-styles.

For Honor

CONCEPT ■ Sword-fighting focused action game set in the medieval period and featuring a blend of Vikings, samurai and European knights. Can be played in both single and multiplayer.

Guard, pivot, pommel, thrust and advance

There's an immediate feeling of satisfaction upon taking control of a warrior in *For Honor*, the upcoming action title based wholly around sword-based combat. Characters stand large onscreen, taking up a hefty proportion of it in a way similar to that of *Gears of War*; attacks are performed with palpable force and intent; and medieval environments are rendered crisply, allowing full focus on the muddy, tarnished lands and structures in which battles take place. Upon the curtain rising and controller at the ready it's a game that seems to urge you to want to deal damage.

As with any sword-based interaction, your stance rests at the core of any success. Flicking the right analogue stick switches between three stances, forming the basis of both your attack and defence. If you attempt to strike an opponent who is mimicking your stance then they'll block you, otherwise your swing will land. What ensues, then, is a game of cat and mouse as each combatant tries to time a change in stance to catch their opponent off guard.

Other ways to make your opponent vulnerable to your blade include shoving them to send them off balance and pushing them to the floor, although both of these options require you to be incredibly close to them. If you seek to shove when too far then you open yourself up to being stabbed and killed. The AI's ability to present a challenge to you in this regard is impressive, although even at this stage it's clear that the best experience is gained when you set yourself up against another human challenger.

This latest session with the Ubisoft Montreal offering is presented in 4K thanks to it running on the PS4 Pro, the upgraded console offering higher resolutions, enhanced colours and faster framerates than its 'standard' cousin. With the game having seen a great deal of development prior to the PS4 Pro's existence, *For Honor* is taking advantage of only the 4K resolution at this point and, as such, it's the detailing that stands top of the visual spectacle list. Armour plating bears visible signs of combat, individual blades of grass are distinguishable from one another and bark on trees looks more natural than it otherwise would.

What sticks out as most impressive at this point is just how satisfying it is to play an action game prepared to drill down into a focused area of design. Too many studios are trying to squeeze in so many ideas that no single component is given room to breathe and, frankly, Ubisoft Montreal is one of the biggest perpetrators in this regard. *For Honor*, then, looks to be a case of a studio challenging itself by constraining its idea to a narrower, deeper channel.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Release: 14 February 2017
Players: 1-8

Developer Profile

While its output is more diverse than that of other studios, Ubisoft Montreal's recent designs have been focused on the creation of open worlds. *Watch Dogs*, as well as the latest editions of *Assassin's Creed* and *Far Cry*, have arrived from its design team, making the studio one of the most respected creators in this niche.

Developer History

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Siege **2015 [Multi]**
Watch Dogs **2014 [Multi]**
Far Cry 3 **2012 [Multi]**
Assassin's Creed II **2009 [Multi]**

High Point

Despite being more than seven years old, *Assassin's Creed II* remains a high point in the series' increasingly dense history – not least due to the charisma and intrigue of leading protagonist Ezio.



■ Above: Visual detailing stands out instantly upon playing and is especially notable when you see the game running in real-time. Clearly, a lot of work has gone into elements that most art teams would usually gloss over.



jeuxvideo.com BEST ADVENTURE GAME GAMESCOM 2016

WHO SAID IMMORTALITY WAS ETERNAL?

YESTERDAY ORIGINS

OUT NOW!













PENDULO STUDIOS



■ Right: Contrast levels are noticeably improved when playing GT Sport through the PS4 Pro, the effect being particularly noteworthy during night races and when navigating darker sections of track – tail lights, headlights, street lamps and the bright sky breaking into view are given extra prominence.



STEPPING INTO THE VIRTUAL CAR

In addition to making use of the features offered by the PS4 Pro, GT Sport also comes with PSVR support. Playing in VR is a mixed blessing. Yes, the ability to move your head to look across corners and keep track of opponents looking to overtake you is welcome, but the loss of graphical fidelity experienced by moving from a 4K screen to the VR headset is unwelcome.

After a short while the novelty of feeling as though you're actually inside of the car wears thin and you start to crave the lushness of the environments and the wider spectrum of colours provided by 4K and HDR. Already, then, it's picture quality over VR immersion that feels more important here.



■ Above: Graphical fidelity has been impressive throughout the history of the Gran Turismo series, and that remains true for GT Sport. The PS4 Pro's 4K support makes a visible difference to the detailing of the cars and tracks, although the upgrade isn't a necessary requirement when it comes to setting the best lap times.





Gran Turismo Sport

CONCEPT ■ Focused on competition, *Gran Turismo Sport* aims to make you a better driver before asking you to test yourself against others.

Testing the horsepower of the PS4 Pro

In comparison to other *Gran Turismo* releases, *Gran Turismo Sport* is a more focused affair. Gone are the thousand of cars and daunting volume of different racing events, replaced by a more deeply constructed entry built around elite competition. Available vehicles are taken from the upper echelons of the automobile industry, there's a much greater emphasis on competing against – and beating – other players through online tournaments, and there are even going to be competitions held within it that are recognised by motor racing governing body the FIA.

For series creator Kazunori Yamauchi, it must be a dream come true, the designer being not just the head of developer Polyphony Digital but also a professional racing driver who has competed in everything from 24-hour races around Germany's world famous Nurburgring to endurance events in the United States.

Certainly, then, *GT Sport* is aimed more squarely at the racing aficionado than any other game Polyphony has released thus far. It is also the most technically advanced game in the series, which should come as little surprise given that it's the first *Gran Turismo* release to come to the PS4. To really get the most out of it, however, you'll need to be playing on both a PS4 Pro and a 4K HDR television.

Of all the games to have been demonstrated on a PS4 Pro, it's *GT Sport* that is, without question, the most impressive and the one seeking to make the most of the enhanced performance capabilities of the upgraded console.

High dynamic range (HDR) support, for instance, has a striking effect on the contrast levels the game is able to display. Whites are pure white and they are positioned against jet black – this coupling of colour being most striking during races set at night during which the stark light of headlights pierces through the darkness and partially illuminates the track ahead.

4K resolution aids in the creation of cars and tracksides that look more like the real thing, certainly compared to playing on a standard PS4. Everything from the roadside barriers to the glow of the brake discs as you slow down towards the entry point of a corner comes across as cleaner, crisper and more authentic. This might sound like a minor enhancement, but it makes sense that a franchise that dubs itself 'The Real Driving Simulator' should strive for this kind of reflection of our reality.

The combination of 4K and HDR means *GT Sport* can also make use of 'wide color', a display system that allows a greater quantity of the colours recognisable by the human eye to be projected through your television screen. This means that the faded, washed out red of Ferraris that was seen in past games now actually looks like the genuine Ferrari red you see splashed across Formula 1 cars at Spa or F40s cruising the streets of well-to-do neighbourhoods.

Of course, the catch is that to enjoy *GT Sport* in its full glory requires a significant investment. In order to make the most of its visual component, you need a PS4 Pro as well as a 4K HDR television, the latter of the two requiring, at present, a not insignificant chunk of change. Then, if you really want to stake a claim for a spot on the podium, you're going to need a racing wheel, pedals and the means of positioning them as you would expect to find them in a professional-grade race car.

> "GT Sport, and all future GT titles, are going to be supporting 4K, 60HZ, HDR, Wide Color and VR"
>
> KAZ YAMAUCHI POLYPHONY DIGITAL

This sharp focus on modern technology and elite player skill represents a risk for a series that up until now has offered so much variety that it managed to attract, and retain, a huge audience covering various demographics. That risk is heightened further by this being the first *Gran Turismo* game to appear on the PS4, with players put off by this outing likely going to be less inclined to indulge in future releases.

However, this is still a *Gran Turismo* game and the fact that it has provided us with so many great experiences in the past means that we must remain open minded as to *GT Sport*'s potential – even if that potential feels like it's aimed at only the most dedicated few.

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
PS4
Origin:
Japan
Publisher:
Sony
Developer:
Polyphony Digital
Release:
2017
Players:
1-TBC

Developer Profile

CEO of Polyphony and lead designer on the *Gran Turismo* series, Kaz Yamauchi is a man who has dedicated his life to cars and the digital recreation of them. He has led his company since 1995, channelling his passion for driving into the building of *Gran Turismo* and making it one of the most respected driving game franchises of all time.

Developer History

Gran Turismo 6
2013 [PS3]
Gran Turismo 4
2004 [PS2]
Omega Boost
1999 [PS1]
Gran Turismo
1997 [PS1]
Motor Toon Grand Prix
1994 [PS1]

High Point

The original *Gran Turismo* disrupted expectation regarding what is possible from a console-based racing simulator, expanding hugely on the diversity and quality of what had come before it.

Persona 5

CONCEPT ■ A JRPG with a social aspect and one that won't waste your time – a game that meaningfully ties character relationships together and zips by at a brisk pace.

■ Above: We're completely serious when we say that masks seem to run deeper than aesthetic frills in this game. Yes, they look cool, but there seems to be a whole lot more going on, and we hope the metaphor is ably handled.

Bright young things

There's no getting around it – the *Persona* games are stylish as sin. *Persona 3* was stylish, *Persona 4* was stylish even while being set in a bumpkin country town, and *Persona 5* is so stylish it could make a masked ball blush. It would probably have to be a masked ball, too, because as we crawl closer to the game's release, masks seem increasingly intrinsic to whatever *Persona 5* is going to be about.

Even within the restraints of the dungeon in which we mucked around, the masks that the characters wore seemed to be about more than just looking cool (of course, they *did* look cool – the whole game looked cool). This probably has something to do with the art museum caper vibe that was going on, complete with blue ambience and yellow stage-lighting that could easily become a spotlight should you screw up.

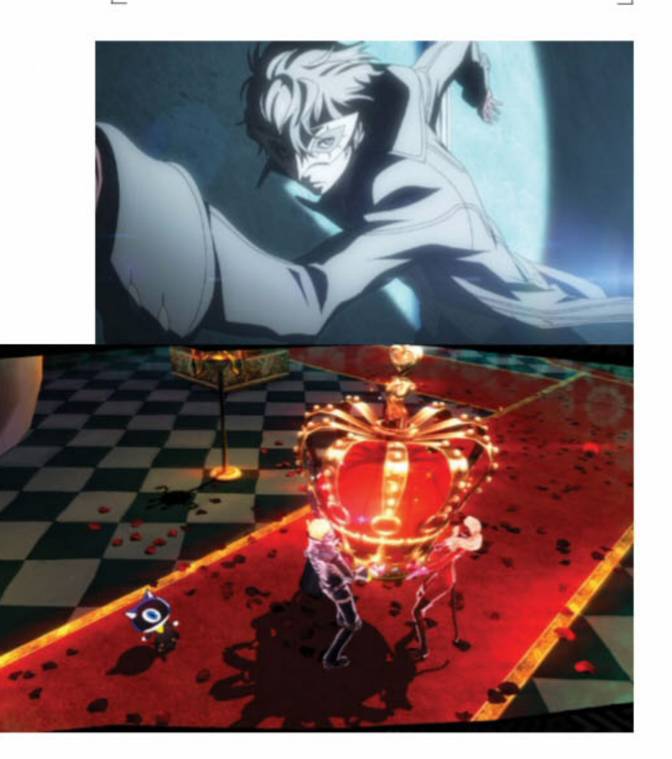
Which is exactly what happened for our first encounter. After learning to use the multipurpose action button to hide behind cover and leap through laser detection systems, we fell a bit too hard for how responsive the game's movement was and ended up with one of the dungeon monsters approaching us from behind.

The way in which this influenced combat was neat. The player's party – waist-high cat included – was positioned back-to-back and the choice of which enemy to attack was restricted. It's a really nice way to create the sense of being in a pinch.

Mercifully, it was over quickly. From what we can tell, battles typically are. *Persona*'s stylistic identity is inherently snappy, and you could literally blink and miss an attack animation. It's actually crazy just how quickly everything slips by; even *Persona 4*, a game which aimed to be no-nonsense, feels positively sluggish now by comparison.

This extends to special Persona attacks that maybe take a fraction of a second longer than a regular sword attack and perhaps a little less time than a gun one. It all loads swiftly, too, at least on the PlayStation 4 version. That a PlayStation 3 version of the game also exists is truly puzzling.

> "For us, this kind of theme and how it looks are what we wanted to achieve. It may look simple, but players may find it more interesting than they expected"
> KATSURA HASHINO ATLUS



■ Above: You've got to hand it to the communicative power of simple character designs. Despite the massive crown taking centre stage in this screen, we really can't take our eyes off of the cat, Morgana – that expression is priceless.



BANG BANG

GUNS ARE HARDLY a new concept to *Persona*. *Persona 3*, notably, caused quite a stir by using guns (or gun-like items called evokers) as a means of summoning special Persona abilities. This was achieved by having the teenage cast repeatedly shoot themselves in the head.

We've seen nothing quite so controversial in *Persona 5*, but the playable cast so far does seem to be packing heat. What is more questionable is just what kind of advantage this offers to any of them, or if firearms serve a special purpose. There was an option to whip out a gun in battle, and we tried this numerous times. You can fire one bullet or let an entire clip loose, but either way it ends that characters attack phase and doesn't do much damage.

INFORMATION

Details

Format:
PS3, PS4
Origin:
Japan
Publisher:
Deep Silver
Developer:
Atlus
Release:
14 February 2017
Players:
1

Developer Profile

One of the most storied RPG developers in Japan, Atlus has been creating games since the mid-1980s, though it was 2008's *Persona 4* that put the developer's flagship *Shin Megami Tensei* franchise, and notably its *Persona* sub-series, on the Western map.

Developer History

Persona 4 Golden
2012 [Vita]
Catherine
2011 [Xbox 360, PS3]
Persona 3 FES
2008 [PS2]
Trauma Centre: Under The Knife
2005 [DS]

High Point

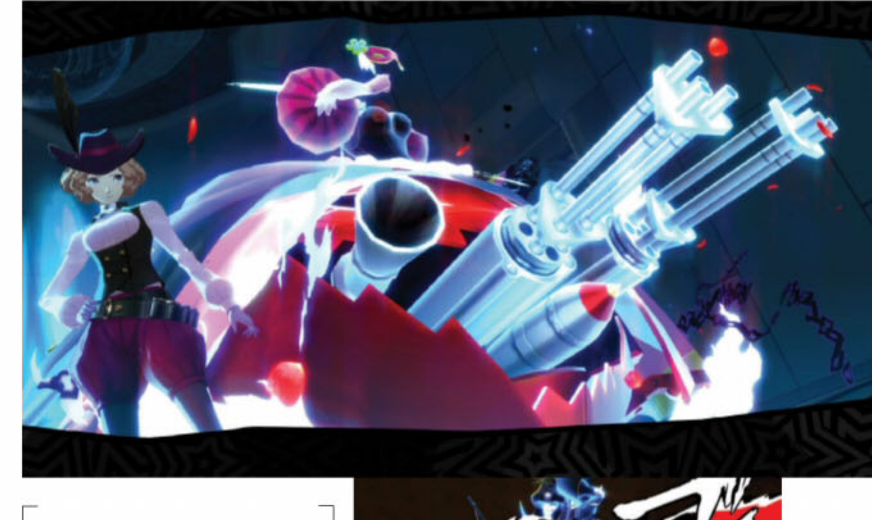
Time will tell if *Persona 5* turns out to be a new high for the series, but for now it likely remains *Persona 4 Golden*, the little Vita port that could, and that did so well it's actually Metacritic's highest rated game for 2012.

After our first two rounds of combat, we got better at sneaking up on our foes, sliding beneath faulty laser detection and hiding behind art exhibits. And again, it's all incredibly swift; when your character moves from one hiding place to the next, they basically teleport.

What was most impressive about this, though, was that it allowed for simple, but solid stealth mechanics. Masked security patrols the dungeon, and if they see you you'll be bathed in yellow light and in for a fight with a bulky foe. Sneak up behind them, or wait behind a corner for just the right moment, and then press the action button, however, and you'll pop out and tear the mask from their face. Not only does this give you the first strike in the game's battle screen, but also, so far as we can tell, it seriously weakens your enemies. Simple speculation suggests that *Persona 5*'s masks somehow bestow different forms and powers upon their wearers.

Of course, the stealth takedown animations were shockingly fast, while still coming across as a little violent. This seems to be the game's personality in a nutshell, really. Even when finishing a fight, instead of a separate screen showing your rewards, the text is simply plastered on the screen while your character starts running. Stop and think about it in a literal way and it's kind of hilarious – you're running in circles. Think about what it *means*, however, and it comes across as a kind of statement – *Persona 5* doesn't stop moving. It will keep pushing forward and has no interest in wasting your time with anything frivolous.

Hopefully the full game fulfils this promise. *Persona 4* has become a classic, and we'd love another JRPG that meshes style and depth so skilfully.





■ Above: We noticed that the guns in the game seem of questionable use – this one probably packs a bit more punch. Below: The anime-style cinematics in the game so far seem slick and well-produced. Honestly, we wouldn't expect anything less.



Sniper Elite 4

CONCEPT ■ The bone-crunching sniper series reaches a new generation of consoles as co-op and competitive multiplayer join the fray.

Playing hide and seek with the Third Reich

While *Sniper Elite* may be as famous for its organ destruction as it is for its sniping gameplay, it's good to see that Rebellion's latest take on the series is attempting to build out on the overall gameplay quality and robustness of the experience rather than simply going for flair and spectacle. *Sniper Elite 4* is looking good, don't get us wrong, but it's also building out on all of its core strengths in the right ways.

While the additional power of this generation's consoles could have simply lead to a prettier version of the game *Sniper Elite 4* is a more open experience, building on its sandbox potential, opening up to new styles of play and giving you a toybox of weapons to pick your way through stages. It's still pretty tough and demanding, the AI is solid and the objectives varied, but how you go about completing a mission can vary a great deal between players.

INFORMATION

Details

Format: PS4, Xbox One, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Rebellion Developments
Developer: In-house
Release: 14 February 2017
Players: 1-2

Developer Profile

Rebellion has been doing its thing since 1992, making it one of the longer running UK studios from its Oxford base. Having expanded into books and comics from 2000 onwards, Rebellion is something of a multimedia player these days, but games remain its key interest.

High Point

This year's release of *Battlezone* has to be a highlight for the studio, offering a strong launch experience for shooter fans while also resurrecting a great retro brand.

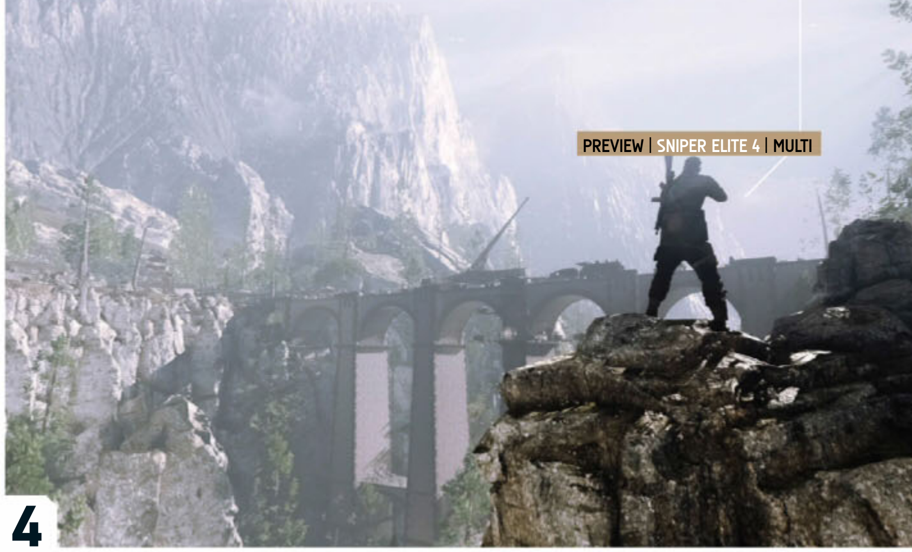
Developer History

Rogue Trooper **2006 [Multi]**
NeverDead **2012 [PS3, 360]**
Sniper Elite III **2014 [Multi]**
Battlezone **2016 [PS4, PC]**

1 SLOW AND STEADY

A methodical approach to *Sniper Elite 4* is highly recommended, taking advantage of chances to sabotage equipment, lay down mines to protect your flanks or to take out trucks and armoured cars that might join you on the map. Tagging of enemies is also highly recommended, not least because there can be a couple of dozen in some of the half-kilometre square maps the game enjoys. Throw on top that each area offers multiple paths in and out and you have a world that encourages slow progress and patient play, not that you need to stick with that.


3


4

5

"Sniper Elite 4 aims to deliver the definitive World War Two shooter for a generation"
PRESS RELEASE REBELLION

2 ANATOMY LESSONS

One of the eye-catching elements of *Sniper Elite* since *V2* has been the X-ray kill cam, which was given greater embellishment when Rebellion starting rewarding different types of kill with pop-up messages and even achievements or trophies depending on the part of the body that got hit. The X-ray kill cam returns of course, but you'll get to see it a lot more often with close-range stealth kills and takedowns giving you something even closer to a *Mortal Kombat* experience. Whether it's a knife to the heart or a knee to the jaw, *Sniper Elite 4* will show you in detail what a mess you're making of the enemy.

3 TACTICAL APPROACH

As you might expect, while a run-and-gun style is something you can pursue if you want, something more considered and planned is likely to get you further in *Sniper Elite 4*. You don't have much health, medkits are limited and conventional weapons aren't necessarily going to get the job done quickly enough for you to machine gun your way around a base. That said, sniping everyone under cover of noise might not get you to your objective either. A silent approach, taking out enemies only to clear paths or create distractions can be a lot more satisfying and will hopefully open up the chance to take on secondary objectives in each stage.

4 OPEN ENDED

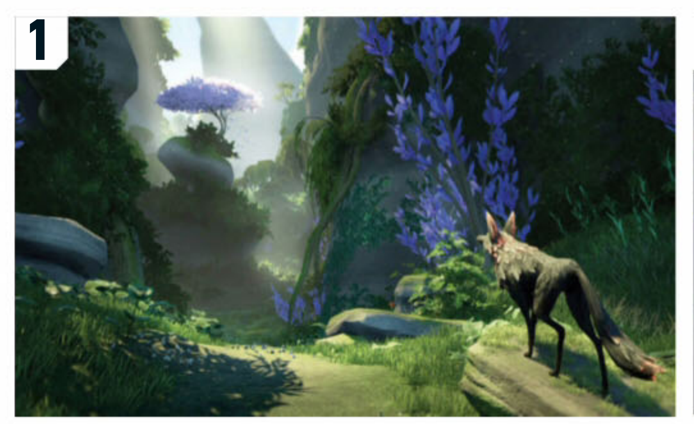
Some of the spectacle of each level is not only in its size, but in the depth of detail Rebellion is adding. In the one area we got to play there was an extensive enemy base, at least three or four secondary but well-armed posts, hidden caves and areas of interest, supplies to be found and new challenges to be crossed if you so wished. And the whole time there were dedicated spotters, counter-snipers and even a radio guy who would call in reinforcements if we went loud for too long close to the main objective. Frankly, this one area could be explored for hours in one attempt to complete it, there's that much to occupy your time.

5 OPEN AND HONEST

As we mentioned, some of the stages in this game are pretty large and you're free to move around in them as you wish. The area we played in actually dropped us about half-way through the level, which meant we could go all the way back to the beginning and find completely new paths to our objective or try out the three or four options ahead of us before ultimately trying to blow up the targets required. What's particularly good about how the environment, AI and gameplay work together is that nothing felt unfair or scripted about how the enemy spot you or chase after you.

SHOWCASE

MORE TITLES TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

1


2


3


4


5


LOST EMBER

Format: **PC, PS4, Xbox One**
Publisher: **Mooneye Studios**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **March 2018**

1 We were introduced to *Lost Ember* early in 2015 when we sat down with former Rockstar music director Craig Conner. He was beginning work on the project with his new company, Audioworks. A successful Kickstarter campaign means this exploration game where you play as a mystical wolf who can possess other creatures should be released in 2018. The art style is gorgeous, the particle effects enticing and the overall tease of discovering a world full of mystery promises a great deal. With the ability to prowl the countryside as a wolf and then leap into the air as a bird, there's a fair amount going on in this ambitious indie.

MAIA

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Machine Studios**
Developer: **Simon Roth**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

2 Taking a closer look at this impressive title our first thought was, "Why haven't there been more attempts at a *Sims*-style game set on a planetary colony?" Seems like a logical mix of the classic community-controlling formula with a heavy dash of survival gameplay. You'll need to mine your way through the rock of your newly colonised planet, set up living areas, resource storage and management, food production and much more as you keep your crew alive and invite new members to join. It's a fascinating take on the genre and available in early access if you want to check it out.

CODE: HARDCORE

Format: **PS4, PC**
Publisher: **Rocket Punch**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **October 2017**

3 Mixing *Titanfall* with *Gunstar Heroes* (at least that was our first take on things) this Beijing-developed action platformer has some fantastic animation and promises gameplay to match. You are able to leap in and out of the mechs provided, presumably making yourself far more vulnerable in the process, but no less dangerous in battle. The mech designs offer different gameplay options and strengths, including one that turns into a fighter jet. It's all big, bold and brazen, and not entirely unlike a similarly titled release from the last generation, *Hard Corps: Uprising*. This is definitely one to keep an eye on.

SERIAL CLEANER

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **iFun4All**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **Q1 2017**

4 We're delighted to say *Serial Cleaner* is shaping up exactly as we hoped. With its fantastic animated style that riffs off Seventies cop dramas and comic books, the ever-increasing challenge of your life as a cleaner, picking up the bodies and cleaning the blood from crime scenes at the behest of your criminal paymasters, is shaping up nicely. The challenge of the game seems to be nicely managed with each level creating additional jobs and more challenging environments. Every stage needs to be cleared in a single sweep without being caught and, smartly, some items will relocate if you fail, meaning plenty of replay value.

NIDHOGG 2

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Messhof**
Developer: **In-house**
ETA: **TBC 2017**

5 It's great to see that *Nidhogg* is coming back with more detailed stages, more weapons and the same great, intense and insane gameplay style. The art style on the other hand has proven a little controversial. Gone is the tight minimalism of the original title and in its place a slightly more cartoonish replacement. It's dividing opinion, but Messhof wanted something new and were attracted to the pixel artwork of Toby Dixon. New weapons open up some interesting tactical challenges as bow and arrow can face off against axe or throwing knives. We think the art is going to grow on us, because the gameplay already has.


X
Y
A
B
NINTENDO
SWITCH



NINTENDO'S MISSING LINK

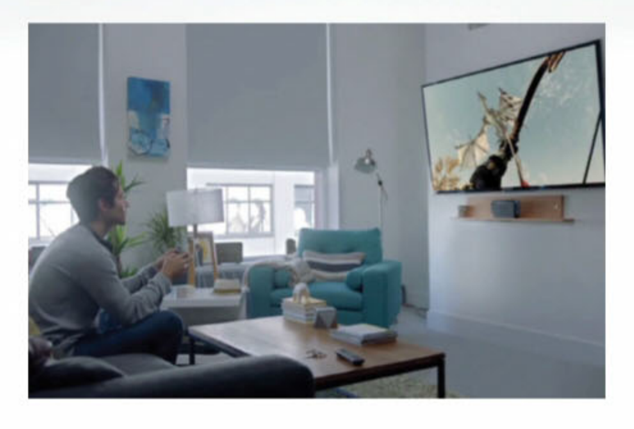
The **Switch** is more than just a hybrid of console and handheld, it's the new way to play that hardcore gamers have been waiting for

Finally we have a name for the console known as NX and the rumours were true; this isn't just a new handheld or a next-gen home console. It's both. The Nintendo Switch is the missing link between the parallel arms of its creator, bringing together over 30 years of console making and nearly 30 years of handheld devices into one sleek, versatile and seemingly rather powerful machine. The Switch is promising experiences like the biggest *Zelda* game ever made that you can enjoy on your sofa as well as on the bus to work. Where once mobile games were compromised by power and processing, we can now dream of experiencing home-console quality, hardcore titles on the move. Nintendo is putting triple-A gaming in the palm of your hand and that, along with a bunch of other reasons, makes it a launch to get excited about. »

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE HARDWARE?

Nintendo teased a number of titles for the Switch with its announcement video including a version of Bethesda's *Skyrim*. We are awaiting official confirmation that this will happen, however.

With the Switch, Nintendo is taking perhaps its biggest gamble yet. As the company attempts to add the mobility of a handheld to the power of a home console system, all we are able to do is sit back and speculate as to how well this endeavour will actually play out. Is the Switch born out of a sense of hyper creativity for Nintendo, or a stubborn desire to veer away from the road well travelled?



It's difficult to say, but one thing we do know for certain is that Switch will not be competing with the PlayStation 4 and Xbox One in terms of raw processing power and graphical fidelity, let alone the PS4 Pro and Project Scorpio. Nintendo is going its own way, hedging its bets on a new, smart piece of technology that allows you the opportunity to play a videogame – of triple-A quality, such as *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild* – wherever, whenever and with whomever you might want to.

If you're at home, you'll be able to slide your device into a Nintendo Switch dock that will provide an output to your television; if you're on the move, you'll be enjoying games on a 6.2-inch, 10-point capacitive multitouch screen that outputs at 720p. It's impressive technology, powered by Nvidia.

Nintendo Switch is driven by a custom Tegra processor, which includes an Nvidia GPU that is "based on the same architecture as the world's top-performing GeForce gaming graphics cards." Basically, if you're wondering how a handheld little bigger than a Wii U Gamepad (which itself outputs at a much lower 420p resolution) can run titles such as *Skyrim* and *Breath Of The Wild* while you're out and about, it's all down to Nvidia and Nintendo putting in a herculean "500 man-years of effort" to engineer the new gaming platform.

To be purely speculative here, we're looking at around 240 pixels per inch. That should guarantee a crisp and clear image on the Switch's dedicated screen, packing the pixels in a little tighter than what the PlayStation Vita traditionally offers, though the spread won't be as dense as the 300+ ppi displays many of us have grown used to through Apple's modern iPhone and iPad mini lines.

This all means that while the Nintendo Switch is powerful and impressive, it isn't in the same way that Microsoft and Sony's home console offerings are. Nintendo is once again demonstrating its capacity for innovation, a desire to take risks in a difficult marketplace, though whether the Switch's inventive design will do enough to compete is anybody's guess.



RUMOUR CONTROL

HOW LONG WILL THE BATTERY LIFE BE?

Likely due to the power of the Tegra, it looks as if the Switch comes with an on-board fan and heatsink to help manage the heat the processor is generating. While power is indeed great for game performance, it will have an impact on battery life. Speculation has it sitting somewhere between three to five hours, not overly dissimilar to both the 3DS and Wii U Gamepad.

IS IT AS POWERFUL AS A PS4/XBOX ONE?

No. Nintendo is clearly putting a lot of effort into fostering third-party relationships, but it has stopped short of delivering a machine capable of totally competing with the other home consoles. It'll be powerful, of that we have little doubt, though it won't be on the same level graphically.

WILL IT BE BACKWARDS COMPATIBLE?

Nvidia's Shield has already proven itself to be more than capable of running emulation software in the past, so the technology is definitely there. We'd expect to see Nintendo revamp the Virtual Console, this time with a focus on GameCube games.

WILL IT PLAY SUPER MARIO RUN?

Nintendo is betting big with its first steps into mobile gaming and we'd be surprised if the likes of *Super Mario Run* – not to mention the new *Fire Emblem* and *Animal Crossing* mobile games – didn't eventually make the jump to Switch.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

Nintendo is waiting until January to announce pricing, though the company has already taken steps to assure gamers and shareholders alike that it won't break the bank, or the company's traditional pricing structure. Expect to see Switch come in at under £349.99.

WILL IT BE DELAYED?

According to various sources, the Nintendo Switch is on track for its March 2017 release, hopefully with *The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild*. The hardware has been finalised, games are in production and, if insiders are to be believed, there's no chance of the date slipping.



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NVIDIA SHIELD?

Powered by similar technology, Switch could just be Nvidia's Shield solution

Nvidia isn't just providing the chips powering the Nintendo Switch, the company also announced that it has been involved in the creation of the "algorithms, computer architecture, system design, system software, APIs, game engines and peripherals." At the heart of it all is the Nvidia Tegra, a high-performance mobile gaming chip that was famously used to power Nvidia's own mobile gaming hardware line, Shield.

Shield always felt like it was on the precipice of something greater – essentially offering PC gaming away from the desktop – and that same concept looks to have been realised within the Nintendo Switch. The Tegra chip has already proven it is capable of running last-gen games at 1080p and 60fps, of producing high-quality emulation (hello revitalised Virtual Console), can support media playback and deliver near-perfect game streaming across a home network. Should Nintendo choose to facilitate any of these features into the Switch, Nvidia has already road-tested them through its iteration on Shield; the console might not be as powerful as a PS4 or Xbox One on paper, but the chipset's flexibility and scalability might just give it the winning edge.

THREE WAYS TO PLAY

This is how you'll be able to interact with your Nintendo Switch







1 GAMING AT HOME

Just because the screen outputs at 720p doesn't necessarily mean that Switch won't push 1080p graphics when docked and outputting to a TV. While the dock itself offers no extra processing power, it is likely that Switch will use different power and performance profiles when docked to help reduce the load on the processor and on-board fan/heatsink.

2 GAMING ON THE MOVE

In theory, if the announcement video is to be believed, taking your gaming on the go is as simple as removing the Switch from its dock. Nintendo is betting big on home console performance married to handheld portability, and if this is going to work the switch between set-ups will need to be seamless.

3 MULTIPLAYER ANYWHERE

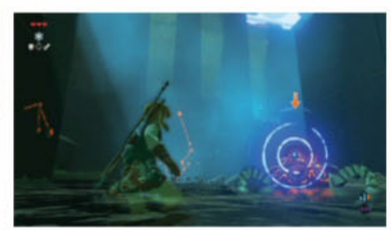
The Switch comes with detachable Joy-Con (which we can only hope is a tentative title) controllers, positioned on either side of the screen. These removable devices allow for two-player multiplayer anywhere you take the backpack sized tablet. With *Mario Kart 9* already being teased, this could be a huge selling point for the system.

SWITCH LAUNCH GAMES

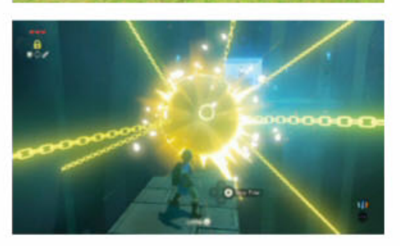
The confirmed and rumoured titles you can look forward to from Nintendo's amazing new console











THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

PUBLISHER: Nintendo **DEVELOPER:** Nintendo EPD **CONFIRMED:** Yes

The one Switch game we know more about than any other is also the one that we are far and away the most excited about. *The Legend Of Zelda* has always been Nintendo's most prestigious series and the idea that it could lead out the charge of Switch titles is fantastic news (although the rumour mill has been grinding a little that it might actually release after the console launch). The fact that it might be the most ambitious *Zelda* game in years only sweetens the deal.

What we're beginning to get a sense of now with *Breath Of The Wild* is not just the bright spectacle and action of this new Link adventure, but the minute-to-minute pacing. We've been exposed to a lot of gameplay and we're sensing that with its open world and well-structured crafting systems, there's a lot of room for quiet, slow wandering. This is a world to get lost in, more on a par with *The Witcher III* and *Skyrim* in so many ways.

And that actually says something else about the new *Zelda*. While its art style feels quite light and fun, this is likely to a much more grown-up adventure, more considered and involving, than some of the lighter entries in the series we've had recently. The *Zelda* games have tended to be at their best when they've had a darker side to them and that's what we're hoping to see from *Breath Of The Wild*.

THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

PUBLISHER: Bethesda **DEVELOPER:** TBC **CONFIRMED:** No

Watching someone pick up *Skyrim* and take it on a plane was one of those jaw-dropping moments of the Switch reveal, but it speaks to more than just the power of the new Nintendo console that it would show off *The Elder Scrolls* straight off the bat. It also speaks to a more concerted effort to embrace hardcore gaming in its modern image. *The Elder Scrolls* is a great example of the dark, deep, player-driven experience we've come to expect in the last couple of generations, and frankly the kind of thing Nintendo has never really offered. Bethesda isn't actually confirming Skyrim for Switch just yet, as this demo was just a sign of its publishing intentions for the new machine, but it is a captivating idea.

SPLATOON

PUBLISHER: Nintendo **DEVELOPER:** TBC **CONFIRMED:** No

The little shooter than could has been an enormous success on the Wii U. Don't believe us? It's sold more copies than *Super Mario Maker* if that helps you get your head around it. It's not clear what plans Nintendo has for *Splatoon*, but with eSports being put front and centre of the Switch reveal and seemingly some new animations added to the game, it looks like Splatoon will be making an appearance in some form.





MARIO KART

PUBLISHER: Nintendo **DEVELOPER:** TBC **CONFIRMED:** No

This was one of a number of classic Nintendo franchises shown off as part of the Nintendo Switch announcement, but the publisher has insisted it doesn't mean a new *Mario Kart* was in any way being confirmed. That said, with Switch's easy two-player Joy-Con setup and the fact that *Mario Kart* has always been as much fun on the sofa as it is on the go, a *Mario Kart* release early on this new machine makes a great deal of sense. What we saw in that first trailer may not be final gameplay, but you can bet a new game in this series (or at least a port of *Mario Kart 8*) is close to the top of the Switch agenda.



SUPER MARIO 3D SWITCH

PUBLISHER: Nintendo **DEVELOPER:** TBC **CONFIRMED:** No

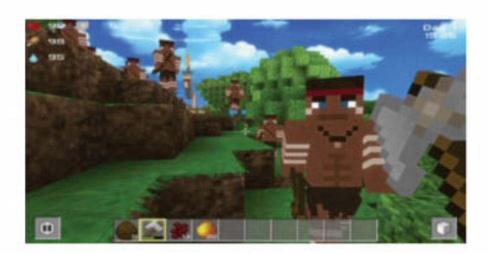
Another teased game from the Switch announcement, this time putting everyone's favourite Italian plumber back on a solo adventure in something that looked more akin to *Super Mario 3D World* than *Mario Galaxy*. We would actually be far more excited about something more like the latter, if only because the *Galaxy* games felt really fresh and the *3D* releases, spinning out from the 3DS, feel a little more conservative in their approach. Whatever the final decision, an early Mario platforming release seems highly likely, although rumours of a *Super Mario Maker* port refuse to go away.



NBA 2K17

PUBLISHER: 2K Games **DEVELOPER:** TBC **CONFIRMED:** No

2K Games is one of a large number of third-party publishers who have been confirmed to be working on games for the Nintendo Switch, a massive change after the relatively sparse third-party support for the Wii U. As part of the Switch reveal we got to see a four-player game of basketball play out using the Joy-Cons and two Switch devices. 2K has said the footage was provided simply to demonstrate its support for the new machine, but it makes a lot of sense for an *NBA 2K* title to land on the console eventually. Something for sports fans to watch out for.



CUBE LIFE: ISLAND SURVIVAL

PUBLISHER: Cypronia **DEVELOPER:** In-house **CONFIRMED:** Yes

While fans of *Minecraft* wait to find out if an official version of Mojang's survival experience will come to Switch, Cypronia's homage to mining and world building is already making the transition from Wii U to the new hybrid device. It's pretty much exactly like the voxel experience that conquered the world, so for a stop-gap while Microsoft jumps on board the Switch, it's not a bad move.



RISE: RACE THE FUTURE

Publisher: VD-Dev Games **Developer:** In-house **Confirmed:** Yes

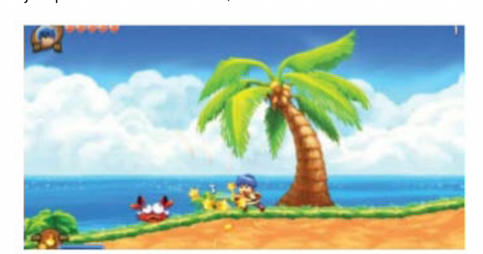
This future-set action racer was one of the first games to announce its intention of launching on Nintendo NX, long before Nintendo officially named and revealed the new hardware. As it stands NX is no longer listed and Switch hasn't been added to the game's listings, but we're confident that's purely an administrative error. Launches on Wii U, PS4, Xbox One and Steam are also planned.



PROJECT SONIC 2017

Publisher: Sega **Developer:** Sonic Team **Confirmed:** Yes

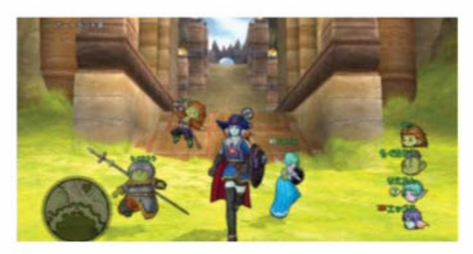
Teased alongside *Sonic Mania* and scheduled for release in late 2017 on multiple platforms, this is another adventure for 3D Sonic, similar to *Sonic Generations* where older and newer versions of our favourite speeding hedgehog will appear. Apparently this will not be a sequel to *Generations*, but we still expect the gameplay to be similar. Sonic Team is getting closer to cracking the 3D Sonic formula.



MONSTER BOY AND THE CURSED KINGDOM

PUBLISHER: FDG Entertainment **DEVELOPER:** Game Atelier **CONFIRMED:** Yes

Monster Boy is one of two titles that FDG Entertainment will be bringing to Switch, something it announced on Twitter not long after the console was officially revealed. What you can expect is a action puzzle-platformer with a fantastic frame rate, gorgeous cartoon visuals and some fun form-shifting powers. It's kind of a spiritual successor to Master System classic *Wonder Boy*.



DRAGON QUEST X

Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** In-house **Confirmed:** Yes

The MMO incarnation of *Dragon Quest* is coming to Switch as part of the version three roll-out that will also see the game launch on PS4 for the first time in 2017. The fact that it's landing on Nintendo's new handheld may hint at some confidence at Square that the handheld can sustain an online connection on the move. We're not entirely clear on that functionality yet, but it would be a great addition.



DRAGON QUEST XI

Publisher: Square Enix **Developer:** Square Enix, Armor Project **Confirmed:** Yes

With a version of this new single-player RPG planned for 3DS, we'll be looking for the Switch version to look a lot more like the PS4 release also scheduled for next year. In fact this might prove to be our first chance to make direct comparisons between the current-gen consoles and the Switch with a brand new release. Beyond that we're hoping for classic turn-based *Dragon Quest* action all the way.


Nintendo appears to want to throw a little more weight behind its titles in the eSports world, which could prove to be a challenge. Professional gaming is a very competitive arena (if you'll excuse the pun).

THE DEVELOPER VERDICT

A few months ago we spoke with indie developers to get their thoughts on the NX. Now we join them again to get their updated impressions of Nintendo Switch and what they think it could achieve

OUR PANEL


GRAHAM SMITH
Co-founder and COO, DrinkBox Studios


CHRIS KINGSLEY
Co-founder and CTO, Rebellion Developments


MEL KIRK
VP of Publishing, Zen Studios

When we talked about NX a while back we talked about hopes for what the new console would offer and additional power was at the top of most lists. Do you get the impression the Switch is offering more power for developers to tap into?

KIRK: At the moment, the Nintendo Switch does not appear to be about system horsepower or technology that takes consoles to new heights. Rather, Nintendo is positioning the device as a home console that can be taken on the go, providing a gaming experience that can continue without interruption. While the technology available to do that is already readily available, Nintendo does have a way of enticing its long-faithful fan base with an exciting first-party library, which should lead to the tech being adopted popularly. Add in reinvigorated third-party support to boundary-pushing technology and raw processing power likely won't matter.

KINGSLEY: It is natural for developers to focus on more power for consoles, but it's never really seemed to be Nintendo's priority. For me, the power argument rests on getting near parity with other consoles to make it easier to bring your games onto multiple platforms. When there's a big difference in power it's a harder job and the risk-reward equation shifts. Switch is definitely more powerful, especially for those used to mobile platforms, but perhaps not powerful enough for some – especially those used to triple-A development. These days, of course, there's quite a wide and diverse range of game types, so there's a lot more opportunity for all developers.

> "IT'S A **POSITIVE MOVE FOR NINTENDO TO GET MORE DEVELOPERS INVOLVED EARLIER** THAN IT HAS DONE IN PREVIOUS GENERATIONS."

SMITH: While we don't have any official specs yet, based on what we've seen so far I do believe that the Switch will be as powerful as the other current generation consoles. The rumours I've been reading also seem to confirm this.

It seems to be built on Nvidia Shield technology. Is that likely to be a better platform to build on than the Wii U has proven to be for third parties?

CK: If development is more akin to other "standard" ways of working, that should help make life easier for developers in general, so we can spend more time making games great and less just making games work.

GS: I'm not familiar with the technology being used in the Switch, but development for the Wii U was not difficult at all in our experience. Nintendo has been in the console business for so long at this point that I'd be very surprised if they did anything to make working with the Switch hardware more difficult than working with their previous consoles.

MK: Most developers have had experience working with Nvidia's tech at some point. Their tools and tech are really easy to integrate, so yes, I think this makes the Switch platform much easier if not better to develop for than Wii U.

The list of third-party publishers and developers Nintendo released is lengthy. Do you feel this marks a significant shift in approach from Nintendo?

MK: Yes, it is a significant shift. I think everyone in the industry is happy to see Nintendo proactively seeking out third-party



A NINTENDO OBSESSION

The Japanese manufacturer has been trying to connect handheld and console gaming for years

Seeing the Nintendo Switch being used to bridge the gap between handheld and console gaming is an amazing thing, but in a way Nintendo has been trying to achieve this integration for years, albeit in a relatively simple way. On three previous occasions it has released connectivity tech for its Game Boy line to link with the consoles it had on the market.

While Intelligent Systems worked on a series of devices across various Nintendo generations, the first in-house attempt was the Super Game Boy, released in 1994. With this cartridge you could play Game Boy games on your TV through a SNES or Super Famicom and using a SNES controller. Some games were released with additional sound functionality if played through the device.

In 2000 it would be followed in spirit by the Transfer Pak for the N64, a device for the controller that would let you transfer data from a Game Boy Color game to the console. The most famous compatible title for this functionality was *Pokémon Stadium*, which let you battle your collected Pokémon in full 3D on your TV. Kind of a dream come true for fans at the time.

The last attempt was the Game Boy Player for GameCube, which attached to the bottom of the console and could play Game Boy, Game Boy Color and GBA titles. While third parties continued to develop tech to allow for this kind of functionality, this is the last time Nintendo attempted connecting handheld games to a home console in such a direct way (some *Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* action connecting directly to the GBA aside). In some ways it feels like Switch is what the company has been looking towards all this time.



THE NINTENDO MASTERPLAN

How the Japanese publisher is reinventing itself in the next 12 months







STEP 1 MOBILE APP EXPANSION

Pokémon Go may not have been directly under Nintendo's management, but it was a part of a broader mobile plan Nintendo is putting into action. Miitomo continues to be updated even though uptake has been light, but the real breakthrough will be *Super Mario Run*. This is Nintendo's first attempt at bringing a first-party license to mobile devices and it will be followed by *Animal Crossing* and *Fire Emblem* in the future.

STEP 2 THE NOSTALGIA FACTOR

Nintendo has never really shied away from its retro past, but the Nintendo Classic Mini NES is something entirely new in terms of embracing the nostalgia of fans. Up until now we've had collections of older games released from time to time, more often simple re-releases of SNES or N64 games on new handhelds, but collecting 30 classic titles into a plug-and-play device just in time for Christmas is something new.

STEP 3 TIME TO SWITCH

As part of a multifaceted approach to releasing games and hardware, the Switch feels like a very different prospect to the Wii U. It is much more clearly defined, its benefits are obvious and its potential exciting. If Nintendo is giving up on having separate home and handheld consoles then pushing retro consoles and mobile releases becomes so much more important. With this three-pronged attack, Nintendo is setting itself up beautifully for the future.

developers and publishers to actively support the new platform.

CK: It's a positive move for Nintendo to get more developers involved earlier than it has done in previous generations. Hopefully that will be reflected in the breadth and number of games released on the Switch.

GS: It's an impressive list! I think that getting third-party developers on board early, and keeping them on board, is vital to a successful console life cycle. The Wii U struggled in this area, so it's good to see Nintendo putting more focus on this.

We talked previously about the importance of a strong Nintendo presence in the games hardware market and the need for it to stand apart as offering an alternative to Sony and Microsoft. Do you think Switch sufficiently serves that purpose?

CK: It will be interesting to see how things go. The games industry has changed a lot in the last few years. Competition has become so intense worldwide, and there are so many different ways for people to play games! Hopefully Nintendo will be successful but you can't take success for granted - it requires a lot of constant hard work.

GS: Assuming that publishers and developers support the Switch and that the hardware is as powerful as its competitors, I do think that the Switch is a strong offering, mainly due to the portability of the console. If you could buy *Bloodborne 2* on any platform, wouldn't you strongly consider buying it on the one that you could easily take with you on the go?

MK: I think there is a segment of hardcore fans that will buy whatever Nintendo releases and will support the company no matter what. We see a deep love for Nintendo from people who grew up gaming in the Eighties and Nineties. When the Wii came along, it appealed to that core group as well as an entirely new group of players, creating a new gaming segment. But after the Wii, where have these people gone? My thoughts are that they moved onto mobile gaming on phones and tablets as their primary gaming device. So, the big question to me is, can Nintendo get that Wii segment, which is now mostly on mobile, to give the Switch a chance? I don't think Nintendo is trying to get the PS4 or Xbox One player; they are going for the mobile audience.

What elements of Switch, as it has been revealed so far, excite you the most?

CK: I like the flexibility of the controllers. In short, they bring new opportunities and of course new challenges.

GS: Of what's been revealed so far, the portability of the console has me the most excited. I travel a lot, and love the idea of what Nintendo is offering with the Switch. I'm picturing myself exploring *Zelda* dungeons in my tent late at night while camping, or playing *Smash Bros* against my neighbour on the flight to GDC.

MK: For me, it's being able to play a console-quality *Mario* or *Zelda* game and take it with me when it's time to leave the house.

HALO WARS 2

343 INDUSTRIES AND CREATIVE ASSEMBLY REVEAL HOW THEY ARE REINVENTING THE RTS

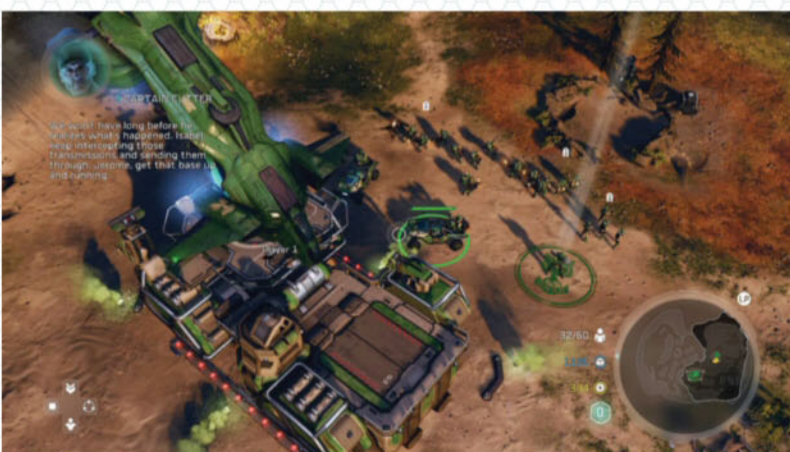


H*alo Wars* was always regarded as a bit of an oddity; a curious attempt to bring about the resurgence of the RTS, on a platform that had always struggled to manage the minutiae of the genre. Microsoft had, after all, become a slave to the 14-buttons bound to the chassis of an Xbox controller; some degree of friction was to be expected in its endeavour to make the game a success.

It's the state of affairs surrounding input control that inevitably produces a gap in competency and complexity with strategy games. A gap, in fact, that's perhaps even wider than the one encountered perpetually by those that wield a controller over a mouse in first-person shooters. The transition of the RTS to console has had a tendency to end about as successfully as an altercation between a pack of Grunts and a Scorpion Tank – valiantly, sure, but it's a battle that shall forever conclude in a maelstrom of good intentions versus chaotic execution.

But of all the Xbox exclusive titles that Microsoft could find itself harangued into making by a coterie of passionate fans in 2016, perhaps it was inevitable that it would be *Halo Wars*, as unlikely as that might seem to some of you. The *Halo* spin-off was only moderately received by critics (for the record, **games™** awarded it seven out of ten), though it sold an estimated 2.6 million copies. That's a pretty solid figure when you consider that, not only was it an Xbox 360 exclusive, but EA's own *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3* failed to break a million on consoles. So what makes *Halo Wars* worthy of a return? Is it just its association with one of gaming's most respected and beloved shooters or something else entirely? »

343 Industries and Creative Assembly have entered into a partnership to build *Halo Wars 2*, with the former leaning on its extensive knowledge of the *Halo* universe, while the latter is utilising its skill set in the strategy genre.

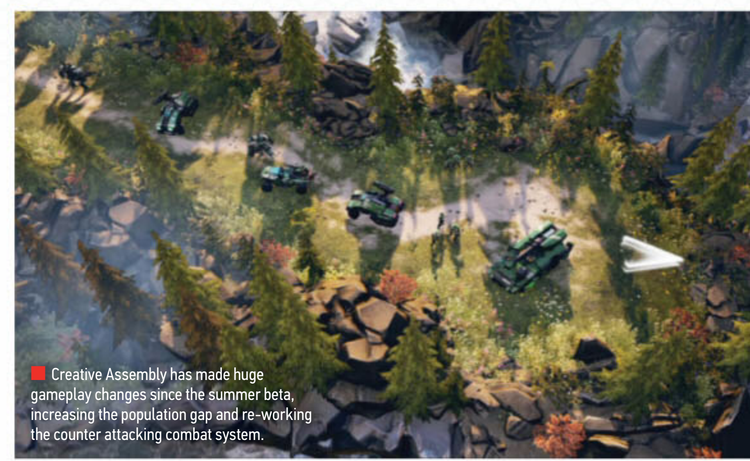




"THE FOUNDATIONS FOR PLAY ARE CENTRED AROUND ACCESSIBILITY, REDUCING FRICTION AND DELIVERING ON THE SCALE HALO IS SO REVERED FOR"



Story is a big part of *Halo Wars* and Creative Assembly is bringing a few interesting elements to combat, such as the addition of powerful boss battles. To defeat these you'll need to focus on quick unit control and the avoidance of big AOE attacks.



Creative Assembly has made huge gameplay changes since the summer beta, increasing the population gap and re-working the counter attacking combat system.

THE PIECES ARE SET

"As an IP, *Halo Wars* is incredibly exciting to me personally," 343 Industries' head of strategy games development, Dan Ayoub, tells us. "I have always loved the RTS genre, but have never been able to make one before. Beyond that, I think *Halo Wars* is similar to *Halo* in that people love the characters, the story and the universe. We're trying to create an IP that is accessible to everyone, and has the potential to reach new audiences. *Halo Wars 2* is the first *Halo* title to ship on both console and PC [simultaneously] and that is really powerful – that we can bring *Halo* to the world in a way we haven't been able to before."

It seems curious to think that an RTS would provide a better bridge between console and PC gamers than an FPS. But *Halo* is so intrinsically linked to console gaming, so tied to the feel of the controller in your hand, that the franchise has gradually found itself out of touch with the PC audience. But with Microsoft's commitment to the Play Anywhere premise – of its games launching and linking up across PC and Xbox One seamlessly – *Halo Wars 2* feels like a good starting point for bringing the Chief's universe back to desktops, and in a way that could succeed where other experiments like twin-stick disappointments *Spartan Assault* and *Spartan Strike* have previously failed.

And who better to handle that brave new step than one of the most celebrated strategy game developers in the world, Creative Assembly? The studio obviously arrives with a vast history in the genre through its work on *Total War* and, most recently, *Total War: Warhammer* (similarly a licensed title), not to mention demonstrating a penchant for delivering quality console experiences in *Alien: Isolation*.

Creative Assembly's one credited venture into console real-time strategy, as some of you might recall, was not terribly successful. It seemed only right that we see how the team now feels about it now – whether *Stormrise* is a dark omen or simply a black cloud on an otherwise clear horizon.

"*Stormrise* was created by our Australian sister studio a long time ago," creative director Alistair Hope explains. Seven years on and we get the impression that the spectre of this creative endeavour still haunts the company, fuelling it to do better now the opportunity has presented itself. "At the UK studio we had been thinking about making a new RTS game for both console and PC for a long time and, as big fans of the original [*Halo Wars*], the possibility of creating a new title was the perfect opportunity to combine our love of strategy games and the *Halo* universe with our most recent development expertise on Xbox One and PC."

So, perhaps nothing to be concerned about from that one blip in what has otherwise been a fairly flawless resume. And let's not forget that *Alien: Isolation* was a stunning experience, harnessing the full power of our current generation of consoles a good while before some other developers managed to catch up. While action games like *Spartan: Total Warrior* and *Viking: Battle For Asgard* showed great competency in console development across the last two generations, *Alien* was something much more potent – *thrilling* even.

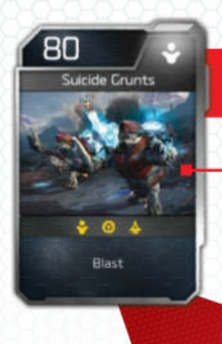
It brought some of that amazing attention to detail that has made the *Total War* games so compelling into the realms of a licensed release, forging an experience that became far richer as a result. The idea that the studio might bring a similar level of commitment and fan-service to a *Halo* game is a mouth-watering prospect and one that we're already beginning to see emerge in *Halo Wars 2*.

"I believe truly understanding and getting deep inside the source material we're working with is part of Creative Assembly's DNA," continues Hope. "Two pillars of the studio are authenticity and attention to detail. Whether we're working with our own IP and the historical reality of *Total War*, or licensed IP we take the same approach. We're in the fortunate position that we only work on games we're passionate about, and I like to think that can be seen in everything we do. With *Halo Wars 2*, it's been really exciting to collaborate with the equally passionate team at 343 to take this amazingly rich source material to create something new and fresh, while staying true to the essence and spirit of the IP."

Passion seems to be an apt description here, as it clearly flows through *Halo Wars 2*. The partnership between the two studios has already produced impressive results, with the game demonstrating a strong commitment and capacity to further expanding *Halo*'s wide-spanning universe. But it's clearly been painstaking too, especially for Creative Assembly, which has been left to shepherd the essence and spirit of the IP without the direction of the original stewards. And so the questions remain: does Creative Assembly have the understanding of the IP to reconstruct it from scratch and can it forge the type of strategy experience that happens to fall within the remit but just outside of its key area of expertise? »

ROCK, PAPER, SPARTAN

UNDERSTANDING THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF HALO WARS 2'S COUNTER ATTACKING PLAY



80
Hornet

INFANTRY BEATS...

If you find yourself under siege from aerial assaults, you'll want to bolster your infantry numbers. Whether it's UNSC soldiers, ODST fighters or Spartans, get troops on the ground to help delay an overwhelming assault from the sky.



GROUND VEHICLES BEAT...

Ground vehicles might be weak against aircraft, but they sure do rip holes in infantry lines and structures. If you see your foe has filled his population cap with basic soldiers, get some ground vehicles deployed immediately. They will be cut down before they even know what hit 'em.



AIRCRAFT BEATS...

If there's a huge wave of ground vehicles – Warthogs, Ghosts and Scorpion tanks – coming your way, they are best combated with aircrafts. Ground vehicles struggle against high-flying craft and will quickly find their power mitigated by superior manoeuvrability.



LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

"I think the first *Halo Wars* nailed a couple of things," Ayoub is quick to suggest, citing proficiency in control on console and expansion of *Halo*'s lore outside of Chief's core adventures. What he won't tell you, however (and for obvious reasons), is that *Halo Wars* also "nailed" one other thing fairly competently: the final nail into the coffin of original development studio Ensemble. After building a reputation in the genre off of the back of the *Age Of Empires* franchise, the studio was shut down shortly after completion of the project in 2009.

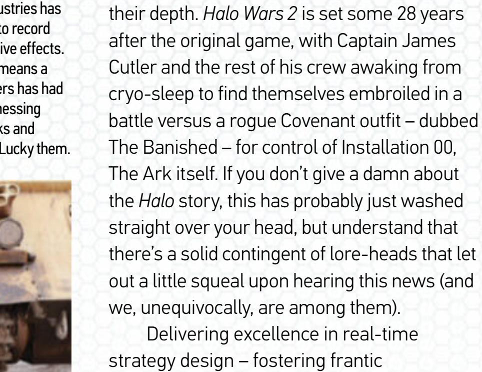
While that's a decision that still frustrates strategy fans to this day, ultimately the studio left a fantastic foundation that's ripe for expansion. *Halo Wars* is designed for those that miss the fast-paced and immediate battles of *Command & Conquer*, and to those that lament the apparent death of *StarCraft II* as it further fades from relevance in an eSports scene belittled by controversy. *Halo Wars 2* is a different kind of strategy game to *Total War* and that, after a somewhat contentious beta, has left some concerned. Though, as we said, Creative Assembly has one hell of a base to expand out from, and it's rare that the toughest battles are ever won in the opening moments of play.

"We used [*Halo Wars*] as a foundation from which [we were able] to evolve and improve, while taking into account how games had changed since the release," says Ayoub, adding, "the first game absolutely served as a foundation that we built from, but we've iterated based on our experience and, more importantly, feedback from the community."



Going into *Halo Wars 2*, it's easy to expect two things: excellence in strategy design, courtesy of Creative Assembly, and a solid expansion of the *Halo* universe thanks to the close partnership with current franchise proponent, 343 Industries. Though one is naturally easier to achieve than the other.

"*Halo Wars* established that the *Halo* Universe is vast enough for there to be multiple stories and multiple great characters,"



"BY ITS VERY NATURE, HALO WARS 2 HAS HAD TO MAKE INTERESTING ADJUSTMENTS TO THE STANDARDISED RTS FORMULA"

says Ayoub, noting that the crew of the Spirit of Fire will be returning, albeit a little out of their depth. *Halo Wars 2* is set some 28 years after the original game, with Captain James Cutler and the rest of his crew awaking from cryo-sleep to find themselves embroiled in a battle versus a rogue Covenant outfit – dubbed The Banished – for control of Installation 00, The Ark itself. If you don't give a damn about the *Halo* story, this has probably just washed straight over your head, but understand that there's a solid contingent of lore-heads that let out a little squeal upon hearing this news (and we, unequivocally, are among them).

Delivering excellence in real-time strategy design – fostering frantic engagements that test the reflexes, like *Halo* does so effortlessly, as quickly as they do the intricacies of considered combat, like in any RTS worth talking about – is a little tougher. Releasing on two platforms simultaneously, building two tailored control schemes, and with two groups of players to appease – each with wildly different expectations – *Halo Wars 2* seems like an almost impossible task. But then, Creative Assembly has a reputation for doing the impossible; be honest, did you ever think the *Alien* franchise could be salvaged after *Colonial Marines*?

The biggest challenge for all involved is creating an experience that can service both sides of the player divide. An accessible action-RPG for console players that must also simultaneously have enough depth to keep the PC community engaged. And this is shining through in a number of noticeable, if not entirely unique ways.

Below To ensure *Halo Wars 2* sounds as good as it looks, 343 Industries has sent a team out to record authentic explosive effects. This essentially means a group of engineers has had a riot of a time messing around with tanks and flamethrowers. Lucky them.





BRINGING RTS BACK TO CONSOLE

"The biggest design goal was to create an accessible action-RTS," says Ayoub of the game that has been in development since 2014. "RTS is such a fun, amazing type of game, and we wanted to bring more people in while evolving it for people that love them already. So we've focused on making a visually beautiful game that tells an amazing story, but also reduces the friction to play."

The foundations for play are centred around accessibility, reducing friction and delivering on the scale *Halo* is so revered for in the FPS scene. This is fostered through very basic design tenets in campaign and traditional multiplayer. The maps are modestly sized, designed to quickly funnel players into engagements and towards resources. Combat is focused around a simple and easy to remember rock/paper/scissors counter-attack design, further fine-tuned from the version that existed in both the original *Halo Wars* and the recent summer beta. Multiple empty bases are scattered around the areas, encouraging considered expansion and rapid convergence. Map control is still king.

Combat is immediate and it's often easy enough to figure out which units are best for any given situation. If you notice an enemy player is heavily focused on a particular unit type, the response is often obvious enough. Finding a balance between a mixed army and the flexibility to quickly counter with emergency builds is still the core of what makes a standard game of *Halo Wars* tick.

To be clear, *Halo Wars 2* doesn't have the complexity of, say, something like a *Total War*, or even *Command & Conquer*. While a degree of specialisation and scouting is required, the game simply doesn't have the capacity for huge populations, nor does it place heavy economy restrictions on play to ever truly challenge your tactical execution.

You'll often find yourself battling the unit cap itself before riding into combat, with the desire to build huge armies mitigated by the somewhat small maximum population size. This can be expanded by taking over other bases, incentivising quick plays for map control, though you'll never feel like you're in the middle of a truly giant war. The balance of population and economy is what has always made games such as *C&C* and *StarCraft* feel exhilarating but, as Ayoub says, *Halo Wars 2* is about reducing friction and increasing accessibility.

But in doing so, Creative Assembly is delivering a game that has a habit of feeling more like a 'My First RTS' experience than an attempt to reinvent the wheel, as it were. »



Playing *Halo Wars 2* with a controller is easy enough, though it does mean many battles result in sending as many available units into combat as you physically can.



The campaign picks up after the original *Halo Wars*, taking the Spirit of Fire into the events of *Halo 5* as you battle for ground on Installation 00.

BLITZ MODE EXPLAINED

1 UPPER HAND

These cards are your available units, which can be played once you have the required amount of energy, as denoted in the top left-hand corner. You can recycle a card out of your hand for 50 energy, though it's random what you'll receive in its place.

2 CONTROL POINT

Three control points are located on the map, and you'll need to maintain presence in each of them to continue earning points. Having a single unit will be enough, though you'll want strong resistance waiting for any contesting enemy units that may appear.

3 ENERGY BOOST

These canisters appear on the map at random and can be used to boost your energy reserves. Energy recharges over time, but it is possible to have your entire army wiped in a single attack. The last thing you want is to watch helplessly as your enemy gains a full map advantage.

4 GOT TIME

A game of Blitz is designed to be played faster than your traditional game of multiplayer. Most games will take just 12 minutes to play, making it perfect for drop-in and out sessions – a huge contrast to the traditional multiplayer that can push upwards of 30 minutes a game.

5 POPULATION CAP

While you don't need to worry about traditional resource management, you will need to keep an eye on your population. Larger units, such as Banshee or Scorpion, will require more unit spaces to drop onto the map. Striking a balance between weaker basic units and powerful game changers is key to the fun here.



HOW HALO 5: GUARDIANS INSPIRED BLITZ

PLAYING THEIR CARDS RIGHT

Blitz in an interesting new mode that could really help to establish *Halo Wars 2* in the eyes of console gamers – those looking for strategy but upset by the lack of total control over the experience. This new card-controlled mode has interesting roots. As Dan Ayoub tells us, it's been directly influenced by 343 Industries' work on *Halo 5: Guardians* and *Warzone*.

"What's great about having multiple games going on in *Halo* is that we all learn from one another and we can adapt from what's happened before," he says. "Players will see some similarities with the REQ cards from *Halo 5: Guardians*, but you'll also see a ton of new things as well."

Those "new things" come in the way of building decks. Between matches you'll be able to build decks, just as you can in most CCGs like *Hearthstone*, and it'll be up to you to build a deck that covers all bases. There's also an focus on card collecting as when you receive duplicates, you'll eventually be able to imbue them with a stat boost, without impacting their energy cost. "We also want players to be excited every time they open a deck, so duplicate cards are valuable since they level up your units – if you get multiple versions of a Warthog, your Warthog gets tougher as a result!"

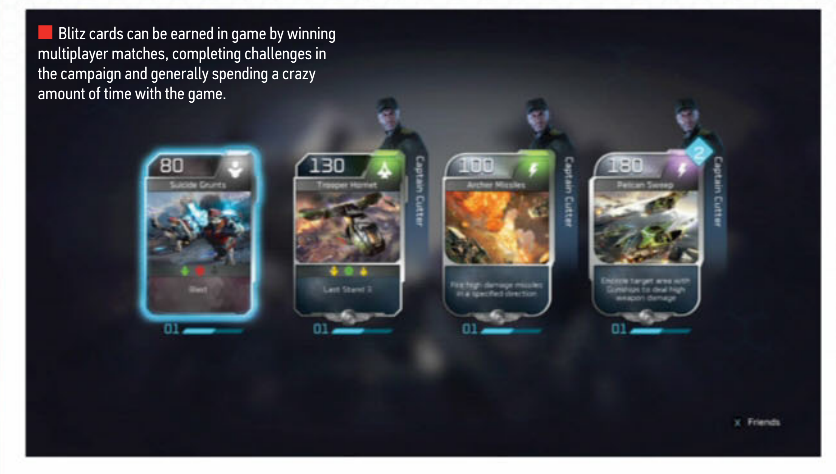
"We've tried to create a system that is best for an RTS style of play and one that will feel unique and drive gameplay across the title," Ayoub continues, as we ask how players will be able to get their hands on new cards. "You don't just get decks by playing Blitz, you can unlock them in other modes as well, including [the] campaign."



Blitz is certainly an interesting new way to play, but it's also joined by classic *Halo* co-op mode Firefight, with you and friends able to combine decks to fight off waves.

"BLITZ IS THE BIGGEST SHAKE-UP TO THE TRADITIONAL RTS FORMULA SINCE THE DAWN OF THE MOBA"





Blitz cards can be earned in game by winning multiplayer matches, completing challenges in the campaign and generally spending a crazy amount of time with the game.



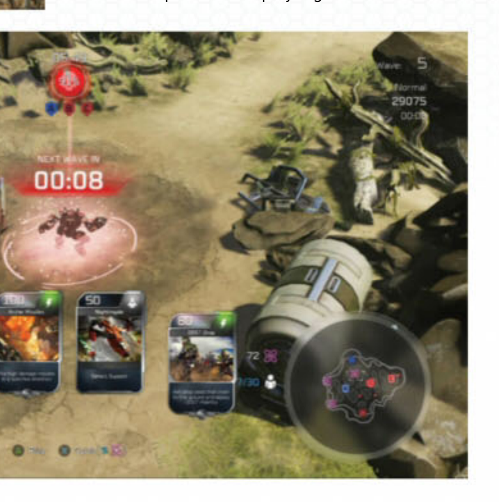
It's a halfway house between the scale of *Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth II* and the speed of *Command & Conqueror*, with the considerable levels of 'micro' found in the high-level *StarCraft II* contests clearly unable to co-exist within the simplicity of the design.

By its very nature, *Halo Wars 2* has had to make interesting adjustments to the standardised RTS formula. Instead of focusing on formation and army variation, it often feels as if the game is happy to let you select all of your units and order them into an area, letting you sit back to witness the spectacle of battle without worrying about the nitty gritty – *Halo Wars 2* sure is a pretty-looking game, after all.

Although, perhaps this was always going to be the case – the controller just isn't retrofitted to allow for the type of intricate play that RTS games thrive on. PC players will find that Creative Assembly has given those with a mouse and keyboard a few extra tools, though that doesn't change the fact that simplicity is still at the heart of this experience. To 343 Industries' credit, it doesn't see designing the game for two platforms as much of a problem.

"We approached it simply by making each platform feel unique. For example, you have a lot more controls to work with when you play on a PC, and we've taken advantage of that," Ayoub tells us. "We've made sure that it feels and plays like you would expect from an RTS on PC. On console, we worked to simplify the actions players would want to take, and you'll see similarities with the PC; for example, on console you can set four groups, while on PC you can set up to ten."

Essentially, gamepad and keyboard users will still find they are able to use one-click shortcuts to perform simple tasks, such as select every unit on the screen or even across the entire battlefield, and you'll even be able to cycle through units of a particular type (though this is, admittedly, still cumbersome). But keyboard users will find that the additional function keys and the addition of granular control will enhance the moment-to-moment strategy of high-level PvP play; we have a feeling Microsoft may struggle to establish *Halo Wars 2* as a competitive multiplayer game on Xbox One.



THE BIGGEST RTS INNOVATION SINCE THE MOBA?

Struggles with competitive play, sure. But *Halo Wars 2* is going to thrive when it comes to battling away with your friends. Input control restrictions are forcing Creative Assembly to get innovative, because beyond the exciting and extensive campaign, beyond the multiplayer modes such as Deathmatch and Dominion, the studio is introducing an all-new mode of play that's unlike anything we've seen before in an RTS: Blitz.

"Ultimately, like any sequel we looked at what worked and how to evolve those areas, and we looked to innovate, with Blitz as a great example of that," says Ayoub. "We now have a mode where you don't build bases or collect resources – you instead build a deck of cards and field units that way. It's a fun, fast, and accessible way to play RTS."

This is a hybrid card-collecting and real-time strategy variant that feels purposefully designed to offer console players a new and engaging way to play whilst the PC lot are off setting macros and command shortcuts. Ayoub describes it as an accessible mode that "turns the RTS on its head", although we feel more inclined to call it what it is: the biggest shake-up to the traditional RTS formula since the dawn of the MOBA.

"We looked at the aspects of a traditional RTS mode – building a base, harvesting resources, managing evolution trees, etc – and looked to streamline by getting players straight to the action in a simple and fun way," he says, adding, "I'm excited for the potential of Blitz – an entirely new way to play RTS, something that seasoned and new players alike can enjoy… I'm really pleased with the response to Blitz."

In Blitz, players find themselves in a symmetrical combat arena called 'The Proving Ground' which features three capture points – if a friendly unit occupies the point, you control it. The aim of the game is to maintain control and fill a capture meter before your opponent can do the same; think of it like a top-down variant of *Halo*'s King Of The Hill.

Here's the stick though – there is no resource management, expansion or unit building in this game mode, instead the pace is dictated by cards. Four of these cards appear at the bottom of the screen at all times, each of which can be used to generate new units, attacks and boosts. For the most part these appear as standard units, letting you call upon Spartans, Warthogs and Pelicans to help maintain control over key areas. Various other cards let you utilise powerful leader attacks or gain temporary buffs in the form of shields and stat boosts.

If it sounds like a free for all, it isn't! Your ability to bring cards into the game is dictated by energy, gained over time or collected via pickups on the map. The more powerful the card, the more energy it requires to bring into play. Blitz isn't your traditional RTS game mode, but it makes sense in the context of *Halo Wars 2*'s struggle to feel at home on console. It's a fast and furious game mode, taking design cues from the likes of *Halo 5*'s own REQ card system and even Blizzard's *Hearthstone*. It cuts down on the fuss, boiling intimate games down to ten minute slugfests; not what you'd really expect from a mode focused around cards, of course, but 343 maintains that it was the best way to bring the mode into reality.

"We ended up with cards, because it's such a universal concept. Deck building not only provides a great visual metaphor, but it also brings a new kind of strategy layer where you build a deck that suits your particular playing style," says Ayoub. "It also creates some amazing opportunities for team mechanics as when you play with others, you'll want to match your decks with theirs to build the most powerful combined force possible. At the end of the day, it adds simplicity and speed, while creating an all new way to play RTS."

Blitz is purpose built for controller-based play, pushing reactive gameplay that forces you to think and act tactically every step of the way. The controller might not manage the micro levels of real-time strategy play, but it is perfectly designed for this lightning-fast style of decision making. The random nature of the cards in your hand – you can build a deck ahead of games, but the order in which units are shuffled out to you is completely random – means you always need to be ready to adapt and to figure out the best foot forward while facing heavy resistance.

It's a mode such as this that turns traditional RTS play on its head, mitigating some of the concerns we have within regular PvP play. *Halo Wars 2* has a lot to prove when it launches for PC and Xbox One in February 2017, but it's innovative new modes such as Blitz that show Creative Assembly is able to bring its flair to a lighter and faster strategy experience.

Halo Wars 2 is staying true to the heart of the IP while trying to expand the scope of play. It's an accessible and fun action-RTS that isn't interested in the dizzying depth that can make many of its genre stablemates seem impenetrable. Whether it'll do enough to appease the PC purists is anybody's guess, but we have a feeling *Halo Wars 2* will stand to show console gamers that strategy and gamepads can indeed walk hand-in-hand across the battlefield.

PAST, PRESENT AND SUDA

IN CONVERSATION WITH GOICHI SUDA



We're running late. Goichi Suda – that's Suda51 to most of us – has taken refuge in a difficult to locate room at MCM, London Comic Con. He's hiding behind an array of security doors and staircases, though we wouldn't expect anything to be easy when it comes to chasing an audience with such a legendary and enigmatic creative force. But all pretences were dropped as soon as we had arrived, the familiar medley of a chest opening from *The Legend Of Zelda* rang out as we finally opened the door – we still aren't sure whether this was by design or merely fate intervening.

But none of that matters now, because there he is, quick to greet with a smile and a handshake. Flanked by a translator from NIS America, **games™** sat down with Suda51 to discuss a career that spans over two decades, one noted for its creative and imaginative output – games fraught with financial risk and vocal detractors. But there's no better time to speak with the creator. He has one foot in the past, remastering his studio, Grasshopper Manufacture's first title whilst simultaneously ensuring he has a future, working on his first title for the current generation. If ever there was a time to reflect, to understand the magic and madness, now would be it.

Your studio, Grasshopper Manufacture, is currently working on two titles, PlayStation 4 exclusive *Let It Die* and a remaster 1999's *The Silver Case*. How does it feel returning to the studio's first game?
I'm super happy! One of the things that's kind of stuck in my mind was that *The Silver Case* was the only one of my games that never came out anywhere outside of Japan. For the longest time I've really wanted to make sure that Western fans got to play it, and so now, with the remaster, [they have] the chance to revisit it. Knowing that it is going to come out for fans in the West, it just makes me super happy.

In a sense, you are acting as a producer on the work of your younger self, that must be kind of strange, right?
That's amazing, because it's exactly like that! It really does feel like I'm the producer for the past version of »


99 kill the past



myself, overseeing a version of me from when I was in my thirties as this young indie creator. That's what it was like revisiting this title.

Do you think you've changed much as a creator in the years since?
You know, at the very beginning I was putting in my heart and soul, my anger and everything else that came with it into the games I created. But, gradually, after working in the industry and after making more games, I think I have loosened up – let my hair down, as it were. I think more humour has crept into my work after that, as I got used to the industry and the business of developing games… I don't know if that's a good thing or not necessarily.





■ Suda 51 notes that once development has concluded on *The Silver Case HD*, he will be subsequently updating and localising *The Silver Case: 25 Ward*. After that, however, the creator is eager to return to one of his personal favourites, *Killer7*, noting that a remaster is high on his list of priorities.

Was that down to confidence? Or did the story of *The Silver Case* necessitate a serious tone?
Maybe not a lack of confidence, but just a restriction of what I was trying to create. It's a crime suspense drama, everything I put into the game had to fit that mood. I had this story and this idea within me, and as I was writing it that's what came out – I wanted to be faithful to that.

There is a little bit of humour in it but, by and large, due to the themes, it is one of my more serious titles and that's the way I wanted it to be. I definitely had a sense of tenseness to me back then, I put that into the game and it didn't really leave a lot of opportunity or areas to inject humour into.

It's clear that there was a lot of passion and emotion in your early work, does returning to *The Silver Case* now make you miss those days of small-team game creation?
Creating big budget games with a huge team is a cool thing, it's really fun, but that said, working on *The Silver Case* again – seeing the emotion that I felt – has made me want to go back and create games in a ten… maybe not even a ten-person team. That's one thing I definitely feel now, when I speak to young indie creators [that are working in small teams], I see the same passion and energy that I felt coming from myself when I first created *The Silver Case*. It's inspiring.



■ Goichi Suda has been splitting his time between the remake of *The Silver Case* and his PS4 exclusive *Let It Die*, an upcoming free-to-play hack-and-slash game that looks to take full advantage of his eye for stylish gameplay as well as horrible amounts of violence.

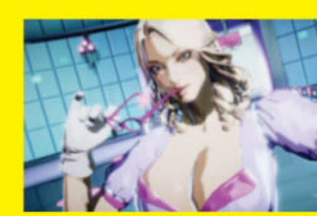
How does development differ transitioning from a project such as *Killer Is Dead* to a remaster of *The Silver Case*?
When you get to something like *Killer Is Dead*, because the project is so large, you can only take care of parts individually, whereas with *The Silver Case* everything was fine-tuned by me. I went through it frame by frame, I was the one taking care of it and looking out for it. That's one of the reasons it's a deeply personal project for me.

In a way, you have the games that I made while I was at Human – the *Fire Pro Wrestling* games – but this was the first game that I made on my own, the first one that I was completely responsible for by myself. So I put everything into it, my heart and soul, so this would be the starting point for everything that came afterwards.

Do you think then, that perhaps more so than any of your other titles, *The Silver Case* best reflects and represents you as a creator, as a person?
Yeah, at the core, *The Silver Case* is absolutely a game that represents me. Though another would be *Killer7*, those would be the two that really speak for me.

***Killer7* has always been lauded for its creative strangeness, where did you draw inspiration from?**
I tried as hard as I could to block out everything else. I wasn't trying to consciously take in any inspiration from anything else that was out there.

In this situation, I was all by myself, but the person that was overseeing the project was [the creator of *Resident Evil*] Mr. Shinji Mikami and he put me in an environment where I was completely free



■ While Grasshopper's games are often fairly ridiculous (though that might be an understatement) Suda does often face push back from developers. Considering the content of games such as *Shadows Of The Damned* and *Killer Is Dead*, it's difficult to imagine what's considered to be "too much".



STEPPING INTO A NEW DIMENSION

HOW LONG DO WE NEED TO WAIT BEFORE WE SEE A SUDA51-DIRECTED VR GAME?

Would it surprise you to learn that Suda51 is excited about the possibilities of virtual reality? No, it didn't shock us much either. The director is known for his creativity and risk taking, two qualities that seem perfectly positioned to take advantage of the emerging VR technology. While Suda is quick to note that he hasn't had a chance to get his hands dirty, as it were, he is already thinking about it… obsessively.

"It's literally on my mind day and night, I'm really excited to make something happen. I definitely want to make something in VR and soon. The world of *The Silver Case*, for example, is a perfect fit for VR and that technology," he says with a smile, noting that were he able to create *The Silver Case* for the first time *now*, there's only one direction he would want to take it in. "Yeah, I'd probably make it in VR if I were making it today," he says, laughing. "I can only imagine the 'film window' that I created, having that actually surround the player, I think it would be an amazing experience."

"It almost goes without saying, but the ability to just put on the headset and be in a different place. That feeling of being somewhere different… there just isn't an appropriate word to describe VR, it's just something different entirely," continues Suda. "You are practically changing your dimension when you put that headset on, you're in a completely different space. A big part of the appeal right now is that so much of it is undiscovered, nobody has really challenged it yet. To be able to stand at the forefront of that, to pave new roads and explore new challenges and opportunities is the really great thing, that's what excites me as a creator. "

to do anything that I wanted to. He just said, 'go to it, this is all yours.' I had tremendous creative freedom to do exactly what I wanted, to just take what was inside of me and turn that into a game. Consequently then, the biggest influence on *Killer7* would have been Shinji Mikami.

Is it terrifying to go from working as part of a larger team to be then solely responsible for working on everything yourself?

It was absolutely scary. In a sense, when you work for a company you are protected, but when you go into development on your own you are responsible for everything, you have nobody to turn to. Even though we were working with ASCII at the time [for *The Silver Case*] I was still the president of Grasshopper Manufacture; I felt a tremendous responsibility to pay my employees, I was responsible for making sure that they could live out their lives too. It was scary, a huge responsibility… I was impressed, honestly, at the beginning by just how much of a change it was compared to before.

At first, I actually tried to make somebody else be the president of Grasshopper because I didn't want to do it [laughs]. But I built up my courage, because I knew that unless I was the president I wouldn't be able to do exactly what I wanted to do.

Grasshopper is simultaneously developing its remaster of *The Silver Case* alongside *Let It Die*, your PS4 exclusive. Do you prefer one style of development over the other?

Doing something like this has really made me want to go back and work in a small team and create games like [*The Silver Case*] again. Working on big budget titles there are things that you can only do because of that budget; in terms of gameplay, in terms of systems and graphics, right? But on the other hand, going to smaller titles like *The Silver Case*, I realised that after revisiting it once more that there are only things you can with that. The amount of passion contained within that game that really, really allows users to completely enter that world, that's the real charm point and the great thing about smaller games like that. You are able [to do] that when you have that small team, which is not necessarily something that you can when you're working on a big title.

Do you foresee a lot of developers leaving the triple-A space to go independent?

I have a feeling that the guys that have made triple-A games might find it really hard to go into a small team. For me personally, I've never made a triple-A game… *Let It Die* is probably an A – one A. It might be easier for guys like that to go back, rather than the triple-A guys.

Where do the other As come from then, you've at least made a double-A game?

There's no such thing really as a double-A game [laughs]. For me, it has more to do with the budget. Single A is like 15 million and then [for triple-A] you've got 20 or 30 million, really big budgets. »

DEFINING MOMENTS

IN A CAREER SPANNING OVER TWO DECADES, THESE ARE JUST A FEW OF SUDA51'S FINEST MOMENTS



SUPER FIRE PRO WRESTLING SPECIAL 1994

1 The second game Suda51 contributed to, *Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special,* is remembered today for its controversial ending in which – spoiler alert – the protagonist commits suicide after coming to the realisation he was only wrestling to stave off depression. It's brutal, and a small window into the unchained style Suda has become renown for.



THE SILVER CASE 1999

2 This edgy police thriller was Suda51's first work as an independent creator and the first title out of his legendary studio, Grasshopper Manufacture. While it's a relatively simple point-and-click on the surface, it introduced many staples of Grasshopper's games, such as the Film Window engine, sharp writing and unsettling scenarios.



KILLER7 2005

3 The first Suda51 game to be released and localised outside of Japan, *Killer7* was part of the excellent 'Capcom Five' initiative for the Nintendo GameCube, which brought innovative exclusives and adult-themed games to the system. *Killer7* was a standout; divisive due to its violence and themes, it has become a cult classic.



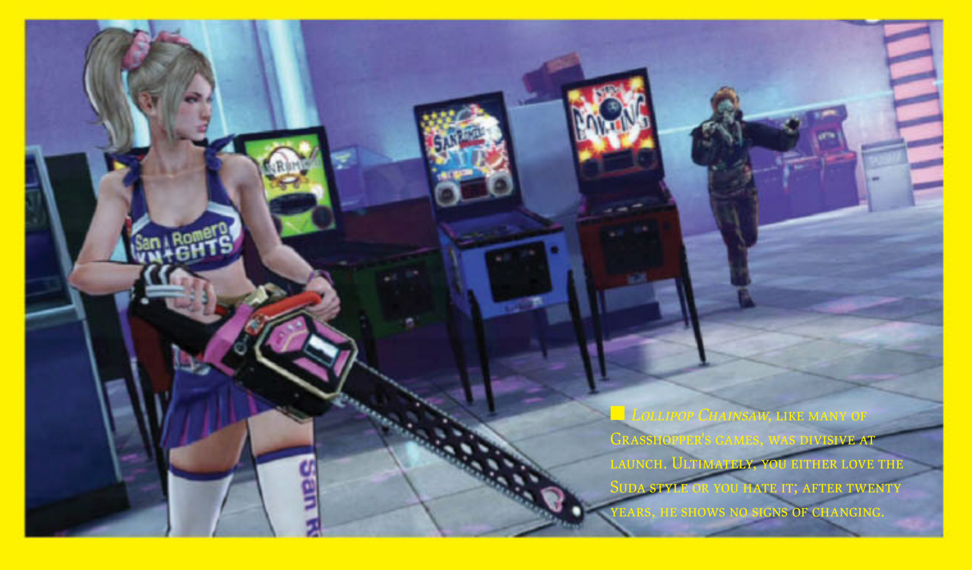
NO MORE HEROES 2007

4 Praised for its unique visual style, biting satire, intuitive motion controls and awesome soundtrack, *No More Heroes* was proof that the Wii had more to offer than party games. While it again drew some controversy because of it themes, by 2007 Suda51 had already established himself (and Grasshopper) as propagators of the weird and wonderful.



LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW 2012

5 While many wrote this hack-and-slash brawler off at the first sign of its scantily dressed cheerleading protagonist, there was a lot to love in *Lollipop Chainsaw.* Its writing was sharp and smart, the premise exciting and imaginative; though it's the intuitive combat that kept people returning in the years since.



■ *Lollipop Chainsaw*, like many of Grasshopper's games, was divisive at launch. Ultimately, you either love the Suda style or you hate it; after twenty years, he shows no signs of changing.

If [a publisher] is going to spend 20 million to make a game, then they are probably going to want to go the extra distance to make something triple-A, which usually pushes the budget up towards 30 million. It's more of a budget thing; a lot of people in the industry have that feeling too.

Aside from budget, are there any other big problems within triple-A development?
One thing about triple-A development is that the staff can get incredibly exhausted, putting them through a development experience like that takes a lot out of them. An answer would definitely be to scale down and tackle more indie-style projects.

What is the biggest lesson that you've learned as a creator over the last decade?
One thing it just boils down to is that making games is difficult [laughs]. Let me put that another way, it isn't easy to make a game. What that means is, that in these ten years Grasshopper has had a period where they had over 100 people working in the office. In that time period I wanted to try many different things, we had many production lines going and I tried to give young staff a chance, I also tried to make mobile games. But the thing I saw within all of this, the things that I learned, is that you need to have certain people within teams, within specific roles and they need to be able to actually perform those roles.

In other words, the people that know how to make games actually need to be the ones making the games; that might seem very self-evident but it is not. Let's say you have a core team – a director, a planner, a lead artist and a lead programmer – having a core like that is incredibly important, having the formation is incredibly important. That's what I've learned over the last ten years.



Seeing as we are looking back, do you have any regrets over missed opportunities?
Yes, there was one game called Yoni which unfortunately never came to market and that one was a big regret of mine, that we were never actually able to get that one out.

Was that because of creative differences or publisher interference?
In all, there's been about five titles [that were never finished] – there's lots of different reasons why, but issues with publishers is definitely one of them. There's been games that have gotten to the beta phase that never came out, there are some that we made prototypes of that never got publisher approval… that [are greenlit] from a publisher to go ahead and continue making the title.

There are definitely regrets, they are kind of like scars. I want to get revenge, as it were. I haven't actually given up on those titles! [Laughter]

Are these titles always hidden away in the back of your mind then?
I have them locked away pretty safely in the back of my head, though they happen to come out again in interviews like this [laughter] and also when I go to make a new title, then they have a tendency to pop out. It's actually a really important thing, remembering the titles I had these ideas for in the past.

It surprises us that you would face difficulties in getting publisher approval, you'd think they would know what they were getting into by hiring Grasshopper! Do ideas get cut because they are just *too* strange?
Yes, yes. Especially in the case of *Shadows Of The Damned*, there was *so* much that got cut, so much… I'm really happy that it not only got through debug, but it didn't get cancelled [laughter]. Honestly, I was really impressed with how much EA actually put up with. I also surprised myself, actually being able to take their demands too… I was very long-suffering, but so were they on the other hand! [Laughter]

Was there anything that you really pushed back on?
Okay… so, you know the gun, The Johnson, right?

Yes…
Okay, so originally, when you pulled the gun up to shoot, the plan was that this little screen would pop up and then you'd see this small girl, named Paula. She would come up and she would talk to you. Usually, you know, as you're aiming a gun the sight would come up, right? But here, the gun is Paula, it's her. But because she's a little girl and she loves rabbits, the idea was that you'd have this little rabbit in a field bouncing around in the sight, right, all happy. I [loved] that idea.

As soon as we set that up, almost instantaneously, EA came in and were like 'what's this rabbit? You need to explain what's going on with this rabbit… why do you have a rabbit in here?' They could just not understand, *at all*. We had this big old discussion about it, I told them 'you guys are wrong and this is why…' [Laughter], they said: fix it. There have been *lots* of things like that.

What's next, then? Has returning to *The Silver Case* reignited a fire within you, as it were?
One thing I really appreciated, looking back at my younger self, was the passion. Back then, I could spend every waking moment pouring everything into creating a game, though now that I'm older I can't really do that [laughter]. What I recognise from that is that I just can't make games like that anymore. Now that I'm an older game creator, I'm trying to use the know-how and experience that comes with my age to make games that are on the level with my younger self.

If you could go back in time to 1999 and teach yourself one lesson, what would it be?
I'd have to say just keep believing in yourself and keep doing what you're doing and it'll pay off. I'd want to encourage my creative vision. At the time, the only person I had to believe in me was myself… well, there was my wife, and she gave me a lot of encouragement, but apart from that there was nobody. To have my older self go and tell my younger self, 'hey, go believe in yourself' that would have been a big thing for me.


TOMB
RA

DEVELOPERS FROM THE TOMB RAIDER SERIES PIECE TOGETHER LARA CROFT'S LIFE AND LEGACY








When *Tomb Raider* made its debut on the Sega Saturn back in 1996, the first thing that many people noticed was the box art. With her gun-toting arms straight, her body turned slightly to one side, staring down the viewer, daring them to make a move. "Who is she?" gasped those drawn to the image. The answer was at the bottom. "Featuring Lara Croft," it said. "Who?" came the reply.

Today, we know exactly who: Lara Croft. And we can trot out some of the many things that everyone thinks of when they discuss the first lady of videogames: her appearances in the Sunday supplements, her place on the cover of influential magazine *The Face*, the real-life models and her forays, thanks to actor Angelina Jolie, in a couple of hit (but perhaps critically miss) movies. The digital Lara once strode out on a 7,000-square-foot screen with singer Bono during the U2 Popmart tour. And, oh yes, she starred in some games too.

Lara burst into the consciousness of gamers thanks to Toby Gard, who was in his early 20s when he began to lay down plans for a new, adventurous character. He had been toying with the idea for a new game for a while and had been given the go-ahead shortly after former Gremlin Graphics sales director Jeremy Heath-Smith (who created Core in 1988) began looking for killer ideas for the emerging 32-bit consoles.

At first, Lara was going to be a man but there were fears that the game would end up aping Indiana Jones, plunging Core Design into legal hot water with LucasArts. But while this reluctance perhaps seems odd given Core created the *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*-inspired *Rick Dangerous* in 1989, it gave Gard the opportunity to try something bold. As *Tomb Raider* programmer Gavin Rummery, says: "Lara was a female Indiana Jones. That is basically who she was." Yet the gaming world had never seen anything like what was about to be unleashed.

Gard's vision was for a lush wide-open 3D adventure infused with action and puzzles, and he proved very much the auteur, developing a strong idea for how the game should be developed and played and how his character should act and look ("Someone in combat trousers was what he was after," said Rummery). There was a single-minded determination to make the game a massive success. "He was so focused early on," said Heather Gibson, the level designer for the first two games. But then he'd invested so much time into it before a single line of code had been written.

> "GARD HATED HAVING NO SAY IN HOW THE GAME SHOULD BE MARKETED"

"Toby had drawings of the outfit hanging around for a while and he'd show them to us and we'd say that's cool," added artist Stuart Atkinson, who also worked the first and second *Tomb Raiders*. As time went on, Lara fast became Gard's baby, albeit one that had flown through »



A design sketch for Lara's new look in *Tomb Raider: Underworld*. It was a little bit more revealing than her earlier costumes and also a bit more militarised.

childhood, the difficult teenage years and most of her 20s. Born on 14 February 1967, his creation was supposedly 29 years old. Yet more importantly she was going to take the world by storm.

DEVELOPING LARA

The debut *Tomb Raider* was initially created by half a dozen people – Gard, Gibson and Rummery as well as level designer Neal Boyd, and coders Paul Douglas and Jason Gosling – in a ramshackle converted Victorian house at 55 Ashbourne Road in Derby. Gard wanted Lara moving with flexibility and poise as she scaled walls and pulled up on ledges, drawing her guns when threatened and engaging in exhausting battles against the beasties.

Gibson saw the potential early on when Gard created a tomb scene in a graphics program called 3D Studio 4. "It was beautifully rendered," she explained. "You'd got the dust cloud and you'd feel the heat from the screen, and he did a camera pan down it. I'd seen some of his 2D work similar to *Prince Of Persia* but I clicked what he was trying to do with this 3D world of adventure."

To get from that stage to a fully realised game, Rummery created a level editor while the game engine evolved rapidly as the small team gave feedback and came up with ideas for what they wanted to see. The bosses trusted them to get on with the task. "Jeremy just left us to it," said Rummery, "and we had so much creative input." But it wasn't an easy feat and the developers spent days and nights hunched over their computers in what seemed to be a perpetual crunch.

Even so, they enjoyed it immensely and there was a great focus. "I could go to Nathan McCree (*Tomb Raider*'s musician) and say I need to add a nice creaky door sound or I could say I had a really lovely idea for a room," said Gibson, "and he would say he could make a great soundtrack or a movie score for when she enters that room to trigger it all up. We were all working together and bouncing off each other."

> "I LOVED THE PUZZLE IN THE SPEEDBOAT IN VENICE. THAT WAS A JAMES BOND MOMENT"

In fact, even though the team was up against it, the enthusiasm for *Tomb Raider* was so great that they would go above and beyond what was expected as they looked to create surprises for the player. "Toby built a T-Rex before I arrived," Rummery recalled. "But it had no meaning because it was never going to be in the story. So we got a bit later on and I said, 'What are we doing with this T-Rex?' We put it in and made it run out in just that one bit. The fact that it scared people and they remember it ensured it was a big scene." It was clear Core Design was creating a monster, and even though the deadline moved forward six weeks when Heath-Smith struck a deal with Sega and needed the game to come out on the Saturn first, they continued to play around. "If something didn't work, we would fix and change it and do it quickly," said McCree. "That wouldn't have been possible with a larger team." The work paid off and the debut game would go on to sell 7.5 million copies. It was something to raise a drink to, for sure. A good job, then, that Lara was able to provide that too.



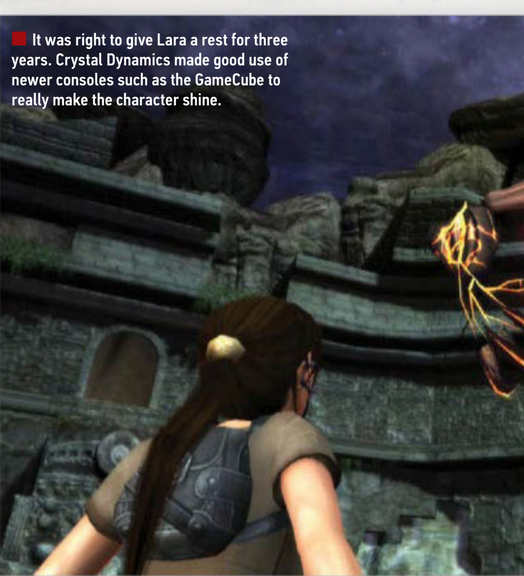
PROMOTING LARA

"We used to get big crates of Lucozade in the office," recalled Andy Sandham, who worked on the third, fourth and fifth games in this long-running series. 'Larazade' was actually what it said on the bottle and yet Gard would not have approved of this. He didn't like the way Lara was being marketed and it was leading to frequent clashes with others involved with the burgeoning brand.

"When the game got its PlayStation launch and release, the hype started to pick up," said Stevens. "[Publisher] Eidos was aware it had a seller on its hands and it was aware journalists who were visiting the building right to the end of the game loved it. Money started getting thrown at it when we were in production of *Tomb Raider II*. Lara as an icon became foremost with the marketing. It wasn't a game any more. She was the star then."

Gard hated having no say in how the game should be marketed. He believed Lara was being over-sexualised and that the focus on her was overshadowing the actual game. Lara as a sex symbol didn't fit well with Gard's vision since *Tomb Raider* wasn't a sexy game despite Lara's perceived sex appeal. So when he finished making the first game, Gard, together with Douglas, told Heath-Smith they were leaving.

"They were having secret meetings in the United States," said Atkinson. "Shiny Entertainment seduced them, paid for them to go to America, paid for a helicopter to transfer them from the airport to their headquarters to wow them and promised them lots of money." In the



It was right to give Lara a rest for three years. Crystal Dynamics made good use of newer consoles such as the GameCube to really make the character shine.

TIMELINE OF TOMB RAIDER

A QUICK-LOOK GUIDE TO LARA'S VARIED STORY THREADS

Year	Games	Film / other	Comics / other
1996	Tomb Raider		
1997	Tomb Raider II		
1998	Tomb Raider III		
1999	TR: The Last Revelation		
2000	Tomb Raider: Chronicles	Tomb Raider	
2001		TR: Curse of the Sword	Lara Croft: Tomb Raider
2002		Tomb Raider: The Prophecy	
2003	TR: The Angel of Darkness		LC: TR – The Cradle of Life
2004			
2005			
2006	Tomb Raider: Legend		



While old-school Lara didn't look as realistic as she does today, her movement was smoother than anything we had seen before in 3D.

end, they remained in the UK and worked at Core for bit longer. "There were a couple of toxic months with lots of whinging daily," said Rummery. It didn't stop the way Lara was marketed, though. After all, *Tomb Raider* was now a major cash cow.

The success of the debut game led to five more games being released between Christmas 1997 and 2003, but it got harder and harder to make each subsequent game. "We used our best locations in *Tomb Raider I*," said Rummery. The demand for Lara meant speed was of the essence, though, and it meant the second game was produced in just eight months, burning out the original team. They got six weeks off as a reward and took a lot from the game: "I loved the puzzle in the speedboat in Venice," said McCree, "that was a *James Bond* moment." But although they began to work on *Tomb Raider III*, they resigned en masse. They just didn't want to do it and yet by this point Lara was a true media star.

"When Lara appeared on the cover of *The Face*, it became this thing – the changing point – and the media became interested in Lara," said Rummery. "I found I was talking to people, and they would say, 'What do you do for a living,' and I'd say, 'Oh well, I worked on *Tomb Raider*,' and they would say, 'What?' and I'd reply, 'Lara Croft,' and they'd say, 'Ooooh'." But the pressure to keep standards high had taken its toll.

The team was persuaded to stay, on the promise they could work on a different, new game. The third *Tomb Raider* was handed to another, larger crew, which began to enjoy the riches Lara brought. "Other teams in the building wanted to kill us," said Sandham, who was a level designer on the third game. "They despised us and we used to take the piss because we were doing *Tomb Raider* and Core needed it. It'd be like, 'Oh, have you seen what I bought this week with the money we're making.' That didn't go down too well."

But *Tomb Raider* had become vitally important. It led to a backlash – TV presenter Violet Berlin, who fronted the ITV videogame show *Bad Influence*, told Radio 5's *The Big Byte* in 1997: "The character you control is a Seventies throwback to the days when pouting lovelies were always to be found propped up against any consumer icon advertised for men." Yet the series was keeping Core and Eidos afloat. "We were generating 90 per cent of Core's cash," said Atkinson. The series had to go on.



The first game to bear Lara Croft's name in the title (and no mention of Tomb Raider) was the superb title *The Guardian Of Light*.

FALL AND RISE

Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation was the title of the fourth game, and Sandham said it brought the series back into focus. "Four rebooted to Egypt and it was great because we were going nuts, sticking things in »

ORIGINAL STORYLINE | HANDHELD/MOBILE GAMES | TOMB RAIDER MOVIES | SECOND TRILOGY | LARA CROFT TOP-DOWN GAMES | NEW SERIES REBOOT

LARA CROFT: GO/RELIC RUN

TOMB RAIDER – ANNIVERSARY | TOMB RAIDER UNDERWORLD | THE TOMB RAIDER TRILOGY

THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT | TEMPLE OF OSIRIS

TOMB RAIDER | RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER | 20-YEAR CELEBRATION

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016



Lara frequently comes under attack, just as she did in *Tomb Raider II*, making for action-packed games.

Above The debut *Tomb Raider* pitched players into the snow and cleverly used the camera to show where gamers should be heading.

THE CHANGING FACE OF LARA

HOW LARA HAS SWAPPED SEX FOR SOPHISTICATION

Lara Croft was born into an era of lads mags at a time when gaming was still perceived as a predominately male hobby. That wasn't necessarily the driving motivation behind Toby Gard's design for Lara. The famous story is that the dimensions of her figure were an accident that was never corrected. Still, it led to accusations that the game was objectifying women, and Core Design didn't want to cause offence. Even though much of the games marketing was based on the character's physical appeal, there were limits to what Core would accept, including legal action against mods that changed her appearance in the game.

Numerous models have played Lara over the years, but Natalie Cook was the first official lookalike. Eidos apparently advertised the role looking for an athletic-looking woman. "I was so honoured to play the part," Cook told us. "I didn't know anything about Lara beforehand but it was a good stepping stone for my career, I like the fact Lara was feisty and took no shit from anyone."

Indeed she didn't. There was a scene at the end of the second game when Lara appeared in the shower and says, "Don't you think you've seen enough?" before firing at the player. "There have been lots of tacky female characters since then – leather clad, whips and chains," said artist Stuart Atkinson. "I think Lara is still quite reserved and always has been." Certainly today, Lara is a deeper, more thoughtful and emotional character with more realistic proportions and a greater emphasis on her facial expressions and personality.



London in three and Jez was saying, 'That's not fucking *Tomb Raider*' and he was right." As before, the team was able to get hands on. "Every level had a personal touch because one person did a whole level," said Andy, who helped to come up with the original story while working on the script and level design. "You see something like Ubisoft and *Assassin's Creed* and there's no real character to the areas. They look beautiful and they play amazingly but you don't get a personal vision."

Despite the game selling 5 million copies, the team didn't want to make the fifth game. "We effectively refused to do it and they gave us some sweeteners," said Sandham. "Obviously we were the only team that could push it out in a year but it was kind of getting ridiculous. We hated Lara by this point and we kept trying to kill her."

Indeed, Andy created a full motion video in *The Last Revelation* where a temple collapses and Lara falls off a ledge and looks to have died. Heath-Smith wasn't happy and he ensured Lara went on to live again. By the time *Angel Of Darkness* arrived, gamers were wishing she hadn't. The sixth game was a major flop critically and commercially (it sold 2.5 million copies). "*Angel Of Darkness* had the biggest team ever and it tried to use the model that we had when we were sat in a little room," said Rummery. It didn't work. Core struggled to make the transition to the PlayStation 2 and the resulting title had clumsy controls and multiple bugs.

It was so bad that Murti Schofield, the lead writer and casting for the game, said his favourite memory was "turning it off" (although he added: "When I was down in the London studios for the dialogue, to hear the voices going down was a powerful moment. It was the last *Tomb Raider* game Core Design made and the reins were handed to California-based Crystal Dynamics.

This reinvigorated the franchise. Lara was given a much-needed three-year break and she returned in 2006 with a fresh look in *Legend*. Her look was changed a little (to some controversy) but it sold well enough to spark two further titles including the re-made first game *Anniversary* in 2007 and *Underworld* in 2008. The games represented Lara's middle years since the series was rebooted again in 2013 with the simply titled *Tomb Raider*. That game went back to Gard's original plan for a less sexed-up Lara and it became the fastest-selling *Tomb Raider* game with 3.4 million shifted in the first month.



This was a Lara for the 21st Century, built from the same guiding principles that had made her such a powerful heroic force in the first place. It is this Lara that we saw in 2015's *Rise Of The Tomb Raider*, and she continues to inspire new generations of gamers with her incredible adventures.

LEGACY OF LARA

And inspire she has. "There are some amazing life-changing stories from fans who have done amazing things because of Lara Croft," said McCree, who composed for the first three *Tomb Raider* games. "From a musical point of view, there have been people who have started studying music because they heard *Tomb Raider*, and people who became graphic artists because they have loved playing the game and looking at how it's built and stuff. People have changed their careers and started new careers because of Tomb Raider."

Indeed, some of those people may well have been in the audience when eight of the developers of the *Tomb*

The original development teams on *Tomb Raider* would take responsibility for a level each, often leading to some strange and fun concepts jumping in at the last minute.

Crystal Dynamic's rebooted Lara has not been without controversy, but since *Rise Of The Tomb Raider* she now feels well-established.

Above While *Angel Of Darkness* looked great, the game was a dark moment for the *Tomb Raider* franchise. **Below** Puzzles have always been a major focal point of the *Tomb Raider* games as it was here in *Underworld*.

Raider series took to the stage at Play Expo in Manchester in October 2016. The developers walked out to ecstatic whistles, whoops, cheers and claps. "It felt like we were famous," said McCree. "I was humbled by it." So what has been the secret?

McCree likens the production of the game to inventing *James Bond*, while Gibson reckoned that, "It's not a recipe you can repeat." Gavin Rummery, one of the key programmers for *Tomb Raider*, said: "It's like rolling dice and always coming up with six."

> **"IT'S LIKE ROLLING DICE AND ALWAYS COMING UP WITH SIX"**

But they were all in agreement that it was time for them to be recognised. "The round of applause we got at the end wasn't just a thanks," said Atkinson, of the talk. "There was a lot of enthusiasm." It was certainly a far better reaction than the one they got at the 2001 movie premiere of the Simon West directed film, *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*.

That, as Gibson said, was "almost a taste of fame" but nobody knew who they were. "I remember at the end when the actors got up at the front of the cinema and thanked everyone down to their dog shampooist but they didn't mention the game or anyone to do with it," said Rummery, the disappointment stark in his voice.

"We were waiting, weren't we, Gav?" asked Gibson. "I've never sat through the credits so long in my life." Now, 20 years on from that first release, they feel that the character they helped develop has rewarded them with more than just money.

And there's much to be proud of. Lara Croft and *Tomb Raider* became so big that there is a road named after her in Derby – Lara Croft Way – and she's appeared on the cover of more than 1,000 magazines. The games were the biggest-selling action-adventures on the PSOne and, with overall sales of 36.88 million, *Tomb Raider* is the biggest-selling game franchise with a female lead. To create such a well-known, enduring character is worthy of the highest prize and there is a personal love and affection among the original developers that will never disappear. "For me, the highlight of *Tomb Raider* was working on a great project with nice people and having a really good laugh," said Gibson. The others nodded in agreement.



Lara has officially been recognised by Guinness World Records as appearing on more magazine covers than any other character in gaming history. Not bad for someone who has only been around for the last 20 years.

THE GAMES OF 2016

THE 25 GAMING EXPERIENCES THAT MADE THE YEAR SO SPECIAL

When it comes to compiling a games of the year list, we think it's important to reflect on the impact of a game, how much fun we had playing it, and the influence it will have going forward more than what score we put at the end of our review. This year has had its ups and downs with titles surprising us, some disappointing us and others delivering ideas and experiences that didn't reveal themselves until long after release. With all those things in mind, we present our 25 best games of the year, ordered with respect to how much we enjoyed them, but also how important we think they will be when we all look back at the kind of year 2016 has been for games.





HOW **POKÉMON GO** CAPTURED THE COMMUNITY'S SPIRIT

Released: 6 July 2016 **Developer:** Niantic, Inc. **Publisher:** In-house **Format:** Android, iOS

There's never been a phenomenon quite like *Pokémon Go*. It delivered on the promise of adventure in a way the *Pokémon* games have only ever teased, pushing players – anybody with a smartphone and internet connection – out into the real world in the pursuit of completing the PokéDex. Friendships have been forged and communities created, all around a premise that's so simple it should never have worked. *Pokémon Go* is one of the most successful mobile games of all time, but more than that it has engineered stories and memories that will last a lifetime.

Seeing the stampedes of players in the United States, the efforts some players have gone to in an attempt to catch 'em all and the camaraderie that has been formed in the hunt for the rarest of *Pokémon*, *Go* has been a success in almost every respect. It's impossible to overlook or understate the impact it has had on players and the industry.

"Literally ran non-stop from the pier in Eastbourne to the wish tower. Along with about 30 people when a Gengar appeared. During the early days everyone was hitching rides on bikes etc... this one girl on crutches miraculously got better, ditched her crutches and power walked down. Almost killed myself, when I got there only for a level 83 Gengar."
@V_A_L_H_A_L_L_A

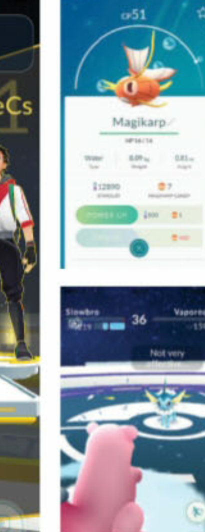
"Finding yourself at the centre of a stampede, hundreds of people running towards a single destination to pursuit of a rare Pokémon, is incredible. It's thrilling, seeing the electric excitement as people succeed and, honestly, kind of funny when they break down in tears at failing. Best though was the guy that lost a Dragonite; he threw his phone into the sea and stormed off, it was *amazing*."
@ORIGAMIKID











"I've always been socially awkward and found it difficult to interact with people and have fun like everybody else. But in the summer, thanks to *Pokémon Go*, I found myself actually talking to people. Going on these big adventures and making friends, and it's all because of this game on my phone, I love it."
@ABYSSOUS

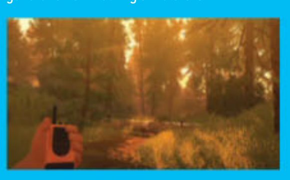
"Best was battling a challenging gym for two hours due to the defenders' setup. It was epic and I completely lost track of time during, not knowing it took twice as long as it did. [Also] great seeing a young child's excitement of placing a Pokémon in a gym for the first time, in a spot opened for them."
@RJFERRET

"I [remember] there being a Vaporeon appear outside the office and me being genuinely the only person on the team who didn't immediately get up to go and catch it. Spare a thought for those of us on Windows Phone."
@BEEMOH



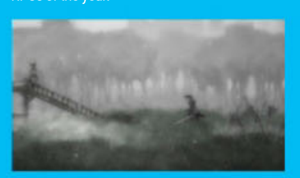
25 FIREWATCH

One of the first major releases of 2016, Campo Santo's title captured our attention with a tale of horror born out of isolation. Using simple audio and visual cues in a colour-splashed wilderness, *Firewatch* cleverly played on a fear of the unknown, tapping into a deep underlying hatred we all have of the unseen. It is the next generation of 'walking simulators'.



24 SALT & SANCTUARY

A game selling itself as a 2D mashup of *Castlevania* and *Dark Souls* isn't usually worth getting excited over, though *Salt & Sanctuary* proved itself to be so much more. The deeply gothic horror vibes of its aesthetic, its intimate web of dungeons, punishing challenge and inventive progression system make it one of the must play action-RPGs of the year.



23 THE LAB

Anything Valve touches turns to gold, so it should come as no surprise that its first foray into VR – in support of the launch of its HTC Vive device – was so impressive. On the surface, it's just a collection of mini-games, though each of them showcases the power and potential of virtual reality to change gaming as we know and understand it.



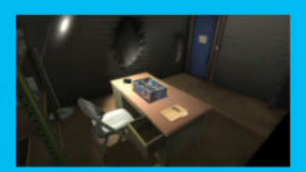
22 BATTLEFIELD 1

DICE finally stepped out of the shadow of *Call Of Duty* and dipped back into history to fuel its latest endeavour. It's a true achievement for audio and visual design, *Battlefield 1* captured the inherent brutality and ferocity of World War I through a stellar single-player campaign, the introduction of rudimentary weapons, gorgeous collapsing battlegrounds and the return of unrivalled all out warfare.



21 **KEEP TALKING AND NOBODY EXPLODES**

Without question one of the most inventive uses of VR yet, this party-puzzle game has been a highlight, never failing to push groups of players into fits of screams and shouts as attempts are made to defuse procedurally-generated bombs across two realities. *Keep Talking And Nobody Explodes* is proof that VR doesn't need to be a totally isolating experience.



20 **STARDEW VALLEY**

Harvest Moon has taken a bit of a dive into mediocrity, but that's okay, *Stardew Valley* satisfies our desire to tend to crops and find love on the homestead. Not only is it fantastic fun, but *Stardew Valley* is also a testament to what a little dedication can deliver, created by a sole developer who was learning the ropes as he went along.



19 **RIGS: MECHANIZED COMBAT LEAGUE**

Virtual Reality has been waiting for its first truly standout experience and Guerrilla Cambridge delivered with this captivating and original PSVR exclusive. *RIGS* is triple-A in its presentation and wildly fun in its execution, proving that there's scope for captivating, fast and truly engaging games in virtual reality without motion sickness crushing any hope of cultivating longevity.





18 **DARK SOULS III**

Dark Souls III is a glorious memorial to all of the controllers that have been broken in service of surviving Hidetaka Miyazaki particular brand of infuriating ingenuity. If this is truly our last venture into the mouth of madness that is *Dark Souls* then it is one hell of a swansong, a challenging gauntlet that will be remembered across the generation.



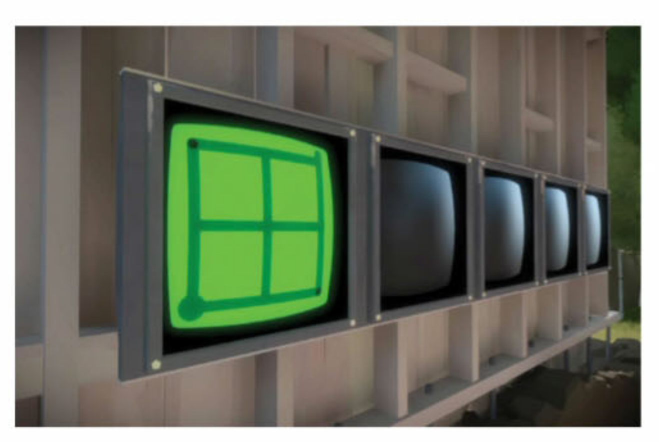


HOW **THE WITNESS** TAUGHT US ITS PUZZLE SOLVING TECHNIQUES

Released: 26 January 2016 **Developer:** Thekla, Inc **Publisher:** In-house **Format:** PS4, PC, Xbox One

1 Line and form

Everything in *The Witness* begins simply enough. Draw the line from the start point to the end point. But then you need to draw it in such a way as to separate a white square and a black square. Now you need to draw a line that separates the squares and crosses over some dots. Now you need to draw a line that combines coloured squares together in sets of two. And so on, and so on. While the world is open for you to explore, *The Witness* did an amazing job of gradually introducing new puzzle elements in each area that would only make sense if you had been introduced to them gradually elsewhere.



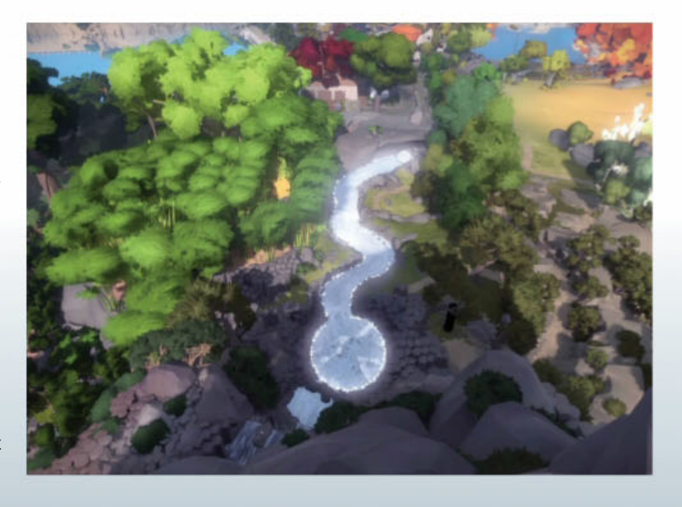


2 Outside of the puzzle screen

As you're introduced to *The Witness*' island locale it appears to be a fairly interesting and colourful sandbox, but little more. Gradually though you begin to notice strange elements like statues with shadows that create interesting images on the floor, shapes that combine to begin looking like the very lines you've been drawing on boards around the island. It becomes clear that this whole location is constructed as a puzzle that is constantly revealing itself. The hand of a creator is visible through reflections in the water, paths on the ground and even the shapes of trees. Once you realise this, the puzzling challenge of this game goes up a level.

3 It's all in your head

What emerges as you play *The Witness* and what makes it one of the best games released this year is that the maze puzzles you're solving are not just puzzles, but a form of communication in and of themselves. With no written instructions or NPCs to interact or learn from, everything you discover about this island and about how to progress is learned from these mazes. They introduce rules, associations and expectations. They break expectations and surprise you. And gradually, in your own head and sometimes on a notepad beside you as you play, you draw out the rules of game. The regular moments of epiphany *The Witness* helps you reach are what make it so special.





3

THE BEST MOMENTS OF **INSIDE**

Released: 29 June 2016 **Developer:** Playdead **Publisher:** In-house **Format:** Xbox One, PC, PS4





SIMON SAYS JUMP

Trying to sneak your way around this totalitarian-seeming world is a challenge throughout *Inside*, but the sequence in which you stand in among a line of drones and must match their actions to avoid detection is an absolute treat. It's an incredibly simple puzzle, but so much fun to play through.

SUB PUNCH

We don't know about you, but we found using the small submarine in this game very satisfying, particularly when we could ram it through a rusty old door to reach the other side. While the creepy, long-haired creatures made these sections pretty scary at times, knowing we had some power for a short while still felt great.







SO MANY BODIES

What exactly is happening in this facility is really left for you to make up your mind about, but it seemed to us to only get weirder and darker as *Inside* went on. One great example of this is the bodies suspended in the strange anti-gravity area of the game. What are they all hanging there for?

A BOY AND A BLOB

The final moments of the game had us on the edge of our seat, confused, elated and utterly engrossed. Being able to smash through walls and claw at our surroundings could almost be described as cathartic if it wasn't ultimately at the expense of the small boy you had been controlling up to that point.

THE OTHER ENDING

And then there's the secret ending that hints at an entirely new interpretation of the game. Collect all of the hidden items in the game and a new area opens up on restarting that ends *Inside* much faster. What does it all mean for the boy, the blob and the world you're in? We'd really rather not speculate.

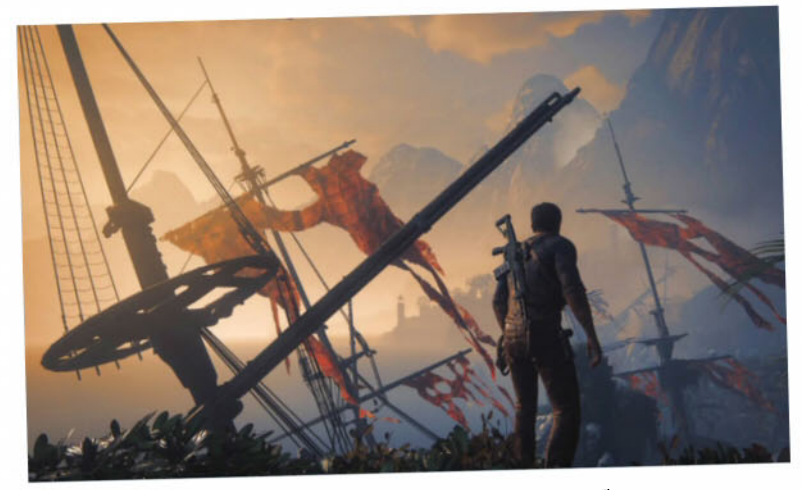


THE PHOTOGENIC WONDERS OF UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

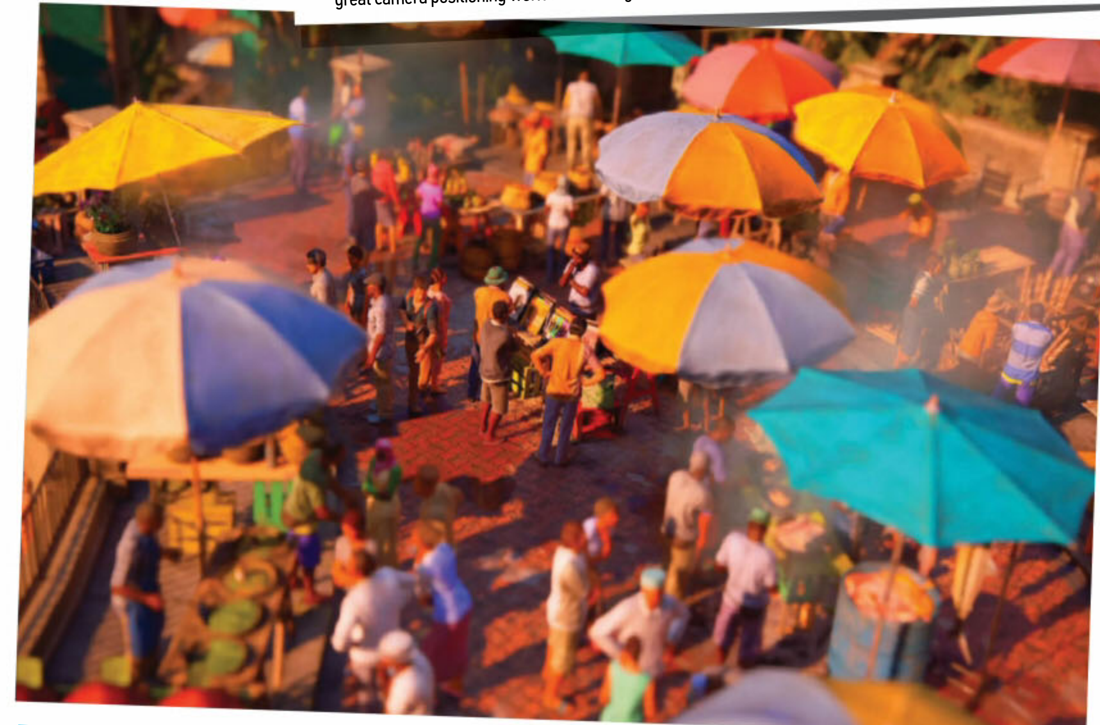
Released: 10 May 2016 **Developer:** Naughty Dog **Publisher:** Sony Interactive Entertainment **Format:** PS4

Naughty Dog created a wonderful, cathartic, exhilarating finale for the *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, tying many threads from the original games, opening up new avenues and insights into its characters and delivering the kind of adventure story that made us fall in love with these games in the first place. As a piece of storytelling, with some amazing performances from its voice and motion capture cast, *Uncharted 4* is one of the best of the year. But it's also stunning to look at.

To celebrate our appreciation of this incredible game, we thought we would chronicle the journey by way of *Uncharted 4*'s photo mode, showing off some of the game's best moments as well as the fidelity of the characters and environments Naughty Dog constructed.



Uncharted 4 took Drake to some of his most vibrant and exotic locations to date. The landscapes in this game were truly stunning and given plenty of room to breath by some great camera positioning work and framing.



Playing around with Photo Mode can be a lot of fun, applying filters and perspective that give the game even more of a realistic or lived in feeling. Watching Drake navigate King's Bay, for instance, feels like something straight out of a travel show.

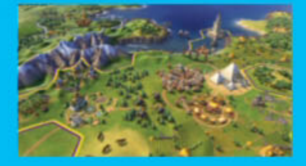
17 ENTER THE GUNGEON

Playing to a love we all seem to have of being totally, utterly overwhelmed, *Enter The Gungeon* delighted with its excellent action, heaps of charm and huge variety of room clearing weapons. Roguelikes might be vogue, but *Enter The Gungeon* stands tall with its slick and precise controls, ensuring that the bullet-hell challenge is never overbearing, but constantly inviting.



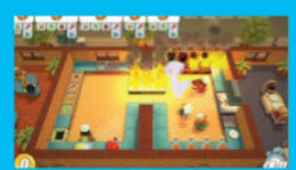
16 SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION VI

With extraordinarily complex turn-based systems, a wild amount of freedom and a strong sense of personality, Firaxis has created something of an addictive masterpiece. *Civilization* has come a long way over the years, and a certain degree of dedication is required to crack its thick skin, but once you do you'll find it difficult to leave behind.



15 OVERCOOKED

Whoever said same-couch co-op was dead? *Overcooked* pushes groups of players into their own localised hell's kitchen, happily destroying friendships as coordinated attempts at cooking dishes devolves into scenes of total chaos. A local multiplayer resurgence has been long overdue, with *Overcooked* proving that there's still fun to be found screaming at people in your immediate vicinity.



14 QUANTUM BREAK

Say what you will about Remedy Entertainment, but it sure knows how to turn genre convention on its head. *Quantum Break* was a strange transmedia experiment that pushed motion capture technology to its limits, with actors reprising their roles with uncanny accuracy across an engaging action game and surprisingly entertaining episodes of live action, there's never been anything quite like it.



The action in *Uncharted 4* was extraordinary, as it has typically been through the series, but the added grunt of the PS4 allowed for more particle effects, improved dynamic lighting and greater immersion in events than before. The big shootouts were taken up a level.



It's often easy to dismiss press images or shots from cut scenes as being heavily controlled and rendered beyond what the minute to minute game could achieve, but heading into Photo Mode in gameplay reveals just how incredible *Uncharted 4* looks even when you're not up close and personal with characters.



Themes or death and decay dominate the finale of *Uncharted 4*, pointing towards something dark for this final chapter in Nathan Drake's adventures. From the bone-strewn caverns of Libertalia to the scuttled ships on the shore, the rags and ragged edges were evocative.



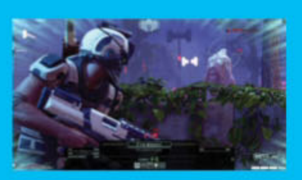
TOM CLANCY'S THE DIVISION

We've seen plenty of open worlds from Ubisoft over the years, but none as intricate and impressive as *The Division* – the scale, unmatched; the size, exhaustedly exhilarating. And to think, still Massive Entertainment managed to fit a quaint shared-world shooter inside of this towering construction. After so many years of waiting, *The Division* proved to be an impressive technical marvel.



12 XCOM 2

XCOM 2 will haunt you. It will make you detest yourself; you'll come to loathe your ability to make snap decisions and cautioned judgement calls. Everybody in your squad will die – you'll regret naming them after friends, it only makes the pain more real. But you'll come back for more, and that's because it's one of the finest turn-based strategy games available.



11 DISHONORED 2

Arkane is quickly proving itself to be masters of modern level design. The scope for creative play is ridiculous, with the studio handing us the tools to tackle its innovative stealth situations with as much (or little) ingenuity as possible. Between the sprawling locales, dual protagonists and huge breadth of options, *Dishonored 2* has emerged as a modern classic.



10 NO MAN'S SKY

Games that push boundaries are key to the evolution of the industry and the impact of *No Man's Sky* should not be understated. Presented with a gorgeous galaxy, we were free to discover new horizons, uncover mysteries and unlock the secrets of the universe. Hello Games let us engage in an expedition we had only ever read about in dusty old sci-fi books.



9 HITMAN

In the face of spiralling budgets, developers have been searching for a way to ease workflow concerns all generation. Cue the entrance of IO Interactive, proving that it is indeed possible to release a triple-A game of a consistently high quality episodically. We never believed that *Hitman* would work, but its killer gameplay and innovative online systems have made us believers.



8 DOOM

2016 will forever be remembered as the year Doomguy exorcised the last demons from the stale FPS genre. id Software delivered one of the slickest, sickest shooters ever constructed in *Doom*. Its breakneck pace, overbearing challenge and fascinating assertion that bathing in blood could keep you alive through firefights in the depths of hell won't soon be forgotten.



7 FORZA HORIZON 3

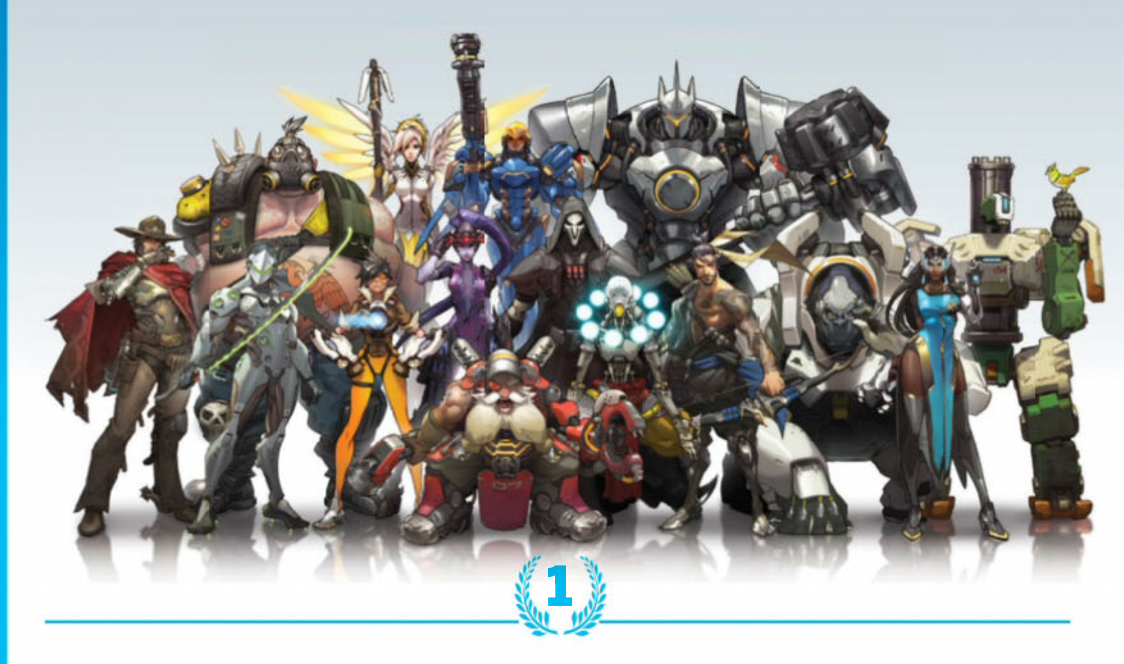
Playground Games had already set the bar pretty high for the arcade racer. Though here we are, with *Forza Horizon 3*. A game that has set a new benchmark for visual fidelity – acting as a stunning technical showcase for the potential of HDR – while the on-track control, integrated multiplayer systems and gorgeous open world won't soon be rivalled, it's stunning.



6 TITANFALL 2

While *Battlefield 1* plays with history and *Call Of Duty* takes off into the stars, Respawn was more than content to continue playing in its corner. *Titanfall 2*'s resulting multiplayer experience is a beautiful combination of speed and ferocity; built around intuitive control, slick shooting and fluid momentum systems that are the closest we have gotten to liquid motion in an FPS.





1

BLIZZARD DISCUSSES THE GAME OF THE YEAR, OVERWATCH

Released: 24 May 2016 **Publisher:** Blizzard Entertainment **Developer:** In-house **Format:** PS4, Xbox One, PC

How has it been seeing *Overwatch* really capture the attention of the gaming community and become such a success, did you ever have any idea it would be so huge?
Jeff Kaplan, *Overwatch* game director and vice president at Blizzard Entertainment:

It was really hard for us because we get so close to the game, it's difficult for us to have proper perspective and objectivity. I started my career working on *World Of Warcraft* and we were so fortunate with that it took off as a cultural phenomenon. I worked on *World Of Warcraft* for six and a half years and then I spent a bunch of years not working on it; that gives you a chance to reflect.

That was a special period of time for me and I knew it might never happen ever again, either at Blizzard or in my career. So for people to embrace *Overwatch* as much as they have is really special to me.



■ Jeff Kaplan is the mastermind behind *Overwatch*'s success, guiding the project to glory out of the ashes of Blizzard's biggest failure, the MMO *Titan*.

A part of what makes *Overwatch* such a success has to be because of the characters. When did you know that you were onto something?
We started falling in love with the heroes and the characters and what they came to represent internally very early on. There was this sense of magic that we were feeling, but you never quite know whether that's just because it was our baby and close to our hearts, or will other people pick it up and make it their own.

***Overwatch* has so much personality, where did the inspiration for the heroes emerge from?**
It's really interesting, because it all started with gameplay. If you've ever been here to the Blizzard campus we have this Orc statue with the company values in front of it and in the centre of it is 'Gameplay First'. Early on, the focus for the heroes was that each one of them had to have completely unique gameplay.

We didn't want to rehash what other heroes had done and we didn't want to homogenise our heroes and have them do similar things. But while it started with this gameplay focus, as we were creating these characters, in terms of the art, the writing of their back-story and their voiceover dialogue lines – we really started to embrace this concept of diversity. We wanted to create these characters from all different walks of life, with very different perspectives.

Creating such a unique group of heroes was at the core of the game then, is that part of what makes it work as well it does?
Not only was the gameplay mandate that it had to be unique and different from hero to hero, but also who the heroes were themselves in terms of people, it became very important to us for them to be different.

It's not like we had some diversity checklist that we were making our way through, our goal was one of inclusivity. As the community approached this game, we recognised that human beings are far more unique than the 23 [characters] we currently have in *Overwatch*. But we painted a picture so that any of us that weren't exactly represented in *Overwatch* could imagine ourselves being represented and that we felt included in this family – even if at times it's a dysfunctional family, we still felt included. That inclusiveness became key to the magic.

Each of the characters has taken on a life of their own within the community, which speaks to how well they were designed; do you have any favourite-fan creations?
We *love* Gremlin D'Va, so much so



> **"I JUST WANT TO SAY THANK YOU TO THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY FOR CREATING SOMETHING SO AWESOME"**
> **JEFF KAPLAN, GAME DIRECTOR**

that when we created her sit emote we incorporated the community's impression of what that meant – so she's playing games and drinking decaffeinated soda. We also love where the community has taken Soldier 72, that they call him dad and World's No.1 Dad.

We try to feed back into the community so they know that we are listening and paying attention. When it came time to do the Summer Games event and we had to pick different sports for different heroes, we made the Golfing 76 victory pose and spray – immediately people associate golf with dads – it's our way of winking back at the community and saying hey, we're with you, we're following you.

How happy are you with the content that has arrived post-launch, it's been at the heart of keeping the game populated, right?
We're very happy with our content roll out. I think we've also learned a ton. As a development team, even though many of us have come from different studios or from different teams within Blizzard, this was the first game released by *our* development team. For us, there was a learning process to go from a 'shipping game' to a 'live-support team', that is a very different mindset to go into.

I think our team has made the transition as fluidly as you could hope for; they are really enthusiastic about it. For us, it's been a learning process; from the Summer Games to Halloween, implementing community feedback, making items purchasable for credit, I think that's all an example of us getting our legs underneath us and sort of learning what works and what doesn't. We've just been trying to set things on the right track for the future, so that there's a lot of faith and trust in us. I'm very happy with our releases so far, the new maps and the new modes.

Two of the biggest additions have been competitive and new heroes, both of which could have upset the natural balance of play…
Anna was really well received, that was a great moment for *Overwatch* development. And *Sombra* so far has been really well received on the PTR. I think the pacing [of content] feels good and the players are beginning to realise that we do something major almost every month. I wish with hindsight – in fact, it isn't even with hindsight because there just wasn't much we could do about it – but as we were listening to feedback and making iterations, we spent a lot of time on competitive mode.

We had a version of it in the beta, then we had Season One and Season Two both with heavy iterations over what was in the beta and that was more time consuming than we had planned for. We were hoping to have smaller iteration cycles and to hit the target quicker with our first version of it, but I think we showed the community that we were listening and that we are willing to make major changes based on their feedback; hopefully we've garnered some good will with the community in our efforts so far.

Every round of *Overwatch* seems to have its own story to tell, are you happy with how players have responded to the modes and pace of the game?
It's been awesome so far. We have our original design philosophy printed right outside our office – that help guide our level designers into building maps – and our first value is that 'it's all about the heroes.'

The thing about our *Overwatch* design philosophy is that it's extremely simple. It's [about] creating these amazing, unique heroes that really stand apart from one another, with these really epic over-the-top abilities that can combine in ways that you could never imagine, with more permutations than any of us would have ever hoped for. It's about taking that really simplistic design and focusing on really high execution on simple hero abilities and not mucking up the game with a lot of really complicated rules or game modes, or what I like to call gimmicks.

A lot of the time, when people are pitching new game modes or new ways to play *Overwatch* to us, they are always very complicated, [but] there's a purity to the flow of gameplay. To the simple elegance of the design, of the heroes, and we want to embrace that, not move away from that. If we can achieve our design goal, of as much depth with as little complexity as possible, that will allow for those stories to come out, that's always been our hope since day one and we are still sticking with it.

Jeff, thank you so much for you time and congrats on being named our game of the year for 2016!
I just want to thank you. This is such an honour for the team and myself, just thank you so much! The *Overwatch* team is so humbled and grateful to be given such an amazing honour. But, we'd like to think that it isn't just an honour that's bestowed on Blizzard or the *Overwatch* team, but on the whole *Overwatch* community.

We really feel that what makes a game great is not the code, or the art or the design that goes into creating a piece of software, but it's all the passion and enthusiasm of the gaming community to really create fun for each other. We feel like this is as much an award that goes to our entire community as much as it is something that we just share here at Blizzard, so, I just want to say thank you to the entire community for creating something so awesome.



Reviews

70 **Battlefield 1**
PS4, Xbox One, PC

72 **Titanfall 2**
PS4, Xbox One, PC

74 **Call Of Duty: Infinite Warfare**
PS4, Xbox One, PC

76 **Civilization VI**
PC

78 **Shadow Warrior 2**
PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC

80 **Dragon Quest Builders**
PS4, PS3, Vita

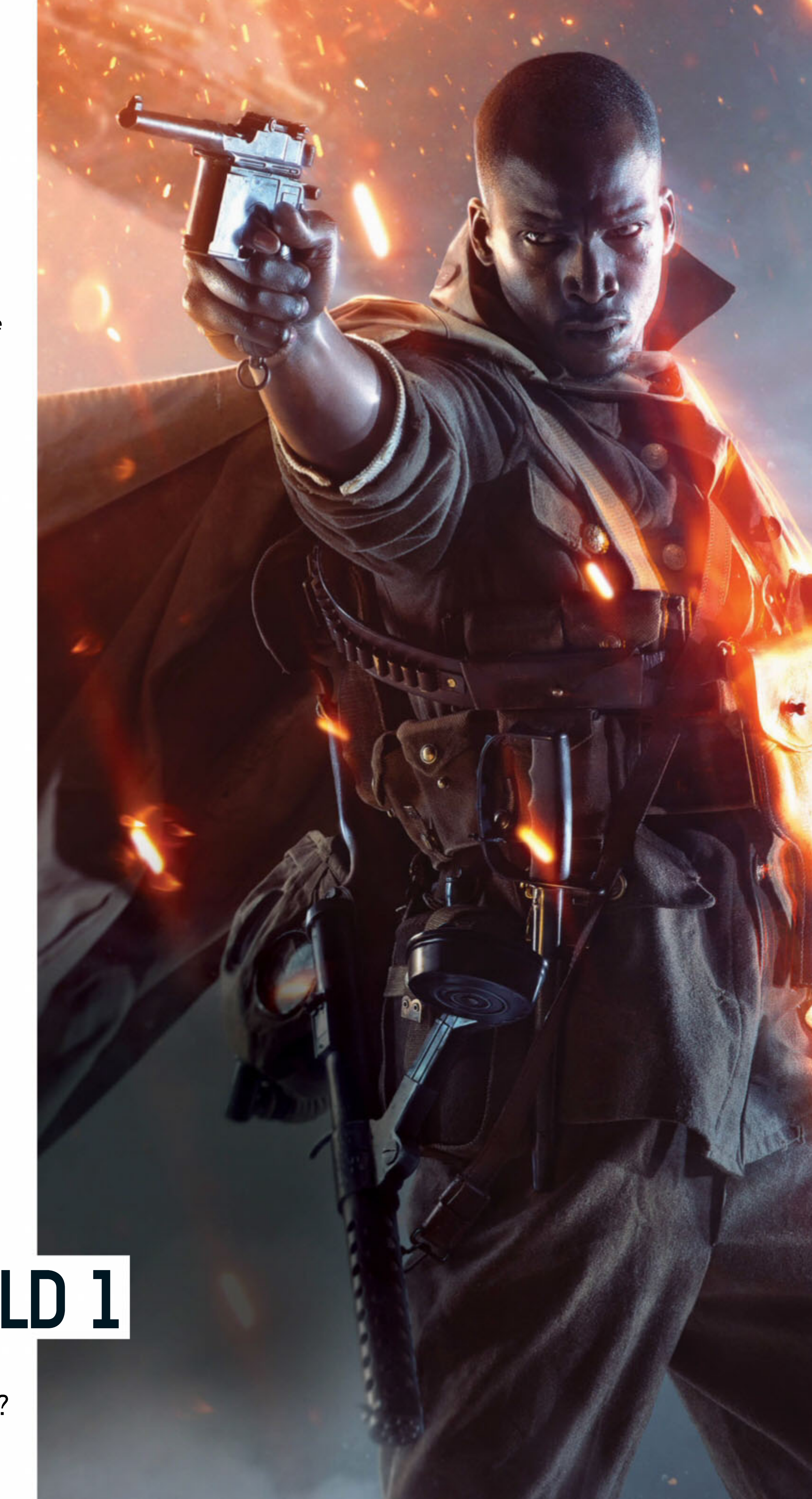
81 **Football Manager 2017**
PC

82 **World Of Final Fantasy**
PS4, Vita

83 **Skylanders Imaginators**
PS4, Xbox One, PS4, 360, Wii U

84 **Manual Samuel**
PS4, Xbox One

84 **Maximun Car**
iOS, Andriod



70

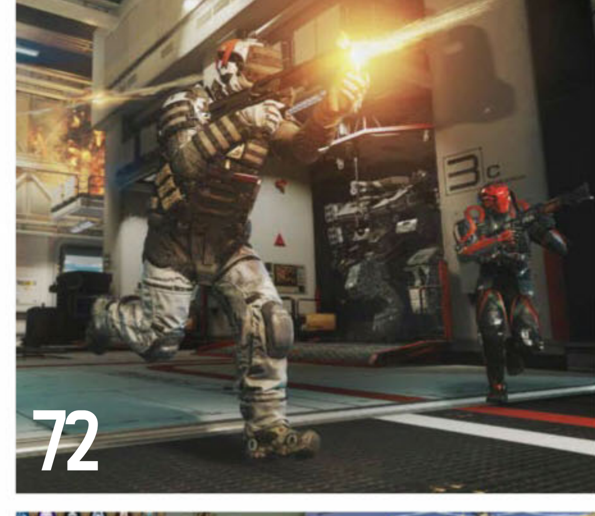
BATTLEFIELD 1

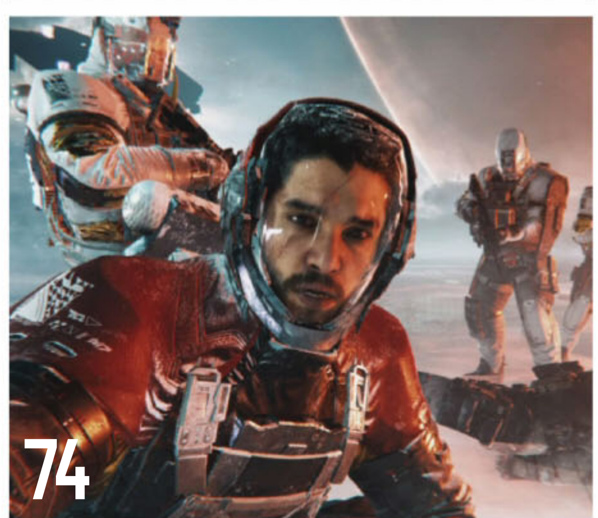
EA has taken its premier shooter to the trenches, but is it down in the dirt?



THE AVERAGE

Three of the numbers in a ten-point scale are of greater importance than the others: five, seven, and of course, ten. Some publications would fool you into believing that a 7/10 game is average, but that just doesn't make sense to us. **games™** reviews videogames on their entertainment value, and so any title that simply performs to an adequate standard will receive a 5/10. Simple. The elusive ten is reserved for games of incredible, irrefutable quality, but please be aware that a score of ten in no way professes to mean perfection. Perfection is an unattainable goal, and on a ten-point scale nothing should be unattainable. Again, simple. Our reviews are not a checklist of technical features with points knocked off for flaws, neither are they a PR-pressured fluff-fest – we'd never let that happen, and besides you'd smell it a mile off. And finally, the reviews you find within these pages are most certainly not statements of fact, they are the opinions of schooled, knowledgeable videogame journalists, designed to enlighten, inform, and engage. The gospel according to **games™**.













AGREE/DISAGREE?

games™ is always right. But that doesn't stop some people disagreeing. Think we've got a review horribly wrong? Or did we nail it?

Let us know through the following channels:


facebook.com/gamesTM


@gamesTMmag
#gamestmiswrong #gamestmisright


gplus.to/gamesTMmagazine

THE FIGHT IS ENDLESS

Battlefield 1

***Battlefield 1* is a beautifully excruciating reflection on the First World War**. In many respects it's a true achievement for the medium, but in others it's a painful reminder as to why this era has been kept so isolated from interactive entertainment. *Battlefield 1* dances haphazardly between exhilaration and frustration in its sprawling multiplayer and limited campaign offering, with developer DICE creating what is bound to be one of the most divisive entries to the series to date.

DICE has finally found the confidence to step back from its obsession with *Call Of Duty*, one that it has fostered since 2011's *Battlefield 3*. Critically, the studio has identified the void that exists in the shooter genre today – the bullet to the heart of creativity as creators continue to flirt with a fascination of maddening momentum systems and physics-bending combat – and attempted to circumvent it entirely by daring to dip into the annals of history once more.

DICE has recognised that in order to move forwards it first had to go backwards. That's a dizzying proposition, but it's led us to this. To the guts and grit of a war that took place nearly a century ago – one remembered, ultimately, for its attrition, uncompromising destruction and wholesale slaughter.

It was perhaps *All Quiet On The Western Front* that best captured the helplessness of World War I, with the 1929 work of fiction delving into the stifling boredom a young German soldier encounters while trapped in the trenches. While DICE hasn't produced an accurate recreation of the conditions Erich Maria Remarque encountered whilst stationed between Torhout and Houthulst – the essence of this has been funnelled into much of *Battlefield 1*'s minute-to-minute action. That is to say, the game can be incredibly boring to play for large stretches of time, but is that the reality of game modes that push the 30-minute mark or the result of unwieldy weaponry and questionable design decisions? A bit of both, actually.

If you look beyond the spectacle and splendour of the *Battlefield 1*'s sensational, if not entirely

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PS4, PC
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: DICE
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-64
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

BATTLEFIELD 4



AS GOOD AS



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2



Above: We hope you like loading times, because *Battlefield 1* features a ton of them. In an effort to load into a game of war, you should expect to be sat waiting for minutes at a time on some occasions before you can play.

Below: *Battlefield 1* excels in many areas, but it struggles in many basic areas, too. The progression and customisation systems are limited and convoluted, caused in part by an unnecessary change to the basic classes.



IF YOU LOOK BEYOND THE SPECTACLE OF BATTLEFIELD 1'S SENSATIONAL SOUND AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN YOU'LL FIND A CONFLICTED GAME

FAQs

Q. IS THERE A STORY?
Battlefield 1 does actually have a campaign worth playing, although it is six hours you'll likely never repeat.

Q. IS BATTLELOG BACK?
EA has finally ditched its bizarre social platform Battlelog, which means we finally see the return of an in-game server browser.

Q. STABLE SERVERS?
From our experience the multiplayer servers are surprisingly stable, though the loading times between games are fairly undesirable.

unrivalled, environmental and sound design you'll find a conflicted game. Whether you are playing returning favourites Conquest and Rush, or the new Operations mode (which acts as an exhilarating blend of the two aforementioned modes with a hint of historical narrative thrown in for good measure), the action flips wildly between an engaging glimpse into the dawn of modern warfare and an exercise in painful frustration and boredom.

Standing as a testament to DICE's talent and as a visual keystone to set *Battlefield 1* apart from the competition, the giant maps in *Battlefield* truly shine. They are diverse play spaces of a staggering scale that support high player counts, fit to handle waves of infantry over land, and smaller bouts across air and sea. DICE has also married this with a colossal procedural destruction system; essentially, it's finally found a happy balance between *Bad Company 2* and *Battlefield 2*, in a way *Battlefield 4* so obviously failed to.

However, a familiar *Battlefield* problem rears its head once again: it's easy all too easy for snipers to dominate large stretches of space between objectives. *Battlefield* might be one of the only console shooters to accurately factor bullet drop into its multiplayer design, though that hasn't stopped swathes of players from taking masterful control of fields of fire and lines of sight that seem to exist across nearly every available space. Once the buildings begin to fall, areas around objectives become bloody killing fields; combine that with a player base that's either confused by changes made to the basic class systems or purposefully opposed to playing the objective (you know the type) and it makes for an experience that grinds as frequently as it delights.

We will put our hands up and admit that we never quite trusted DICE to give World War I the justice and treatment it so obviously deserved. *Battlefield 1* is, its own special way, a nuanced approach to showcasing the grand scale and horror of the conflicts but, again, there's a reason this hasn't been featured too frequently in videogames. DICE may have ditched authenticity when it came to framing battles around trench warfare and gruelling slogs across no man's land, but it has attempted to bring an air of it to the weapons, many of which feel unnecessarily unwieldy or unsatisfactory to use.

Battlefield has always struggled in this respect – its weapon feedback has never been quite as tactile or immediate as that found in *Call Of Duty*, *Titanfall* or just about any other popular FPS we could mention here. But here, when dealing with rudimentary SMGs, LMGs and self-loading rifles, combat – be it through debris, rolling clouds of fog or against impossibly armoured vehicles – can feel haphazard.

Battlefield 1 is in its element when you're with a squad of friends or a group of players that are eager to play the objective (though that's about as likely as EA improving the quality of its online servers). If it all comes together, then you'll find a consistent multiplayer experience that rivals the very best moments you had in *Bad Company 2*. These experiences seem fleeting, though, at least at launch ahead of the inevitable balancing and premium DLC drops. With many games feeling hampered by a desire to try and blend authenticity with sensationalism, *Battlefield 1* is a hell of a lot of fun – a visual powerhouse and a fine return to form for DICE that's sadly hampered by stretches of extreme frustration caused by the studio's desire to take one step too many into the past.



FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

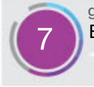
MODERN WARFARE: By venturing so far into the past, *Battlefield 1* can feel fresh and modern in a way the sci-fi leaning games of today struggle to achieve

INTO THE DEPTHS OF HELL

Battlefield finally stepped out of the shadow of *Call Of Duty* this year and delivered its best campaign in years, probably since *Bad Company 2* in 2010. It's a stripped back experience, presenting short vignettes of the global battle across six or so hours with a focus on detailing the horror and violence of the First World War. It's an effective examination of the conflict and, despite some notable omissions and a few mis-steps in terms of presentation, it's a simply stunning delivery from DICE. Sadly, it's also fairly throwaway. While a positive step forward for the studio, which has always struggled marrying its all-out warfare with linear storytelling, it's nothing more than footnote in the overall package as *Battlefield* is still firmly a multiplayer-focused franchise.

VERDICT

FRUSTRATING, YET SPECTACULAR ALL-OUT WAR



gamesTMmag scored **7** for
Battlefield 1

Follow our scores on JUST A SCORE





REMEMBER, THE FLOOR IS LAVA

Titanfall 2

Titanfall 2 is at its weakest when it resembles anything close to traditional. Like any good developer, Respawn Entertainment has used its opportunity to create a sequel to smooth out some of the gameplay quirks and respond to some of the criticism it faced the first time around. The online-campaign experiment is the first casualty of iteration, left by the wayside in favour of a structure far more *traditional*, though the benefits aren't immediately clear.

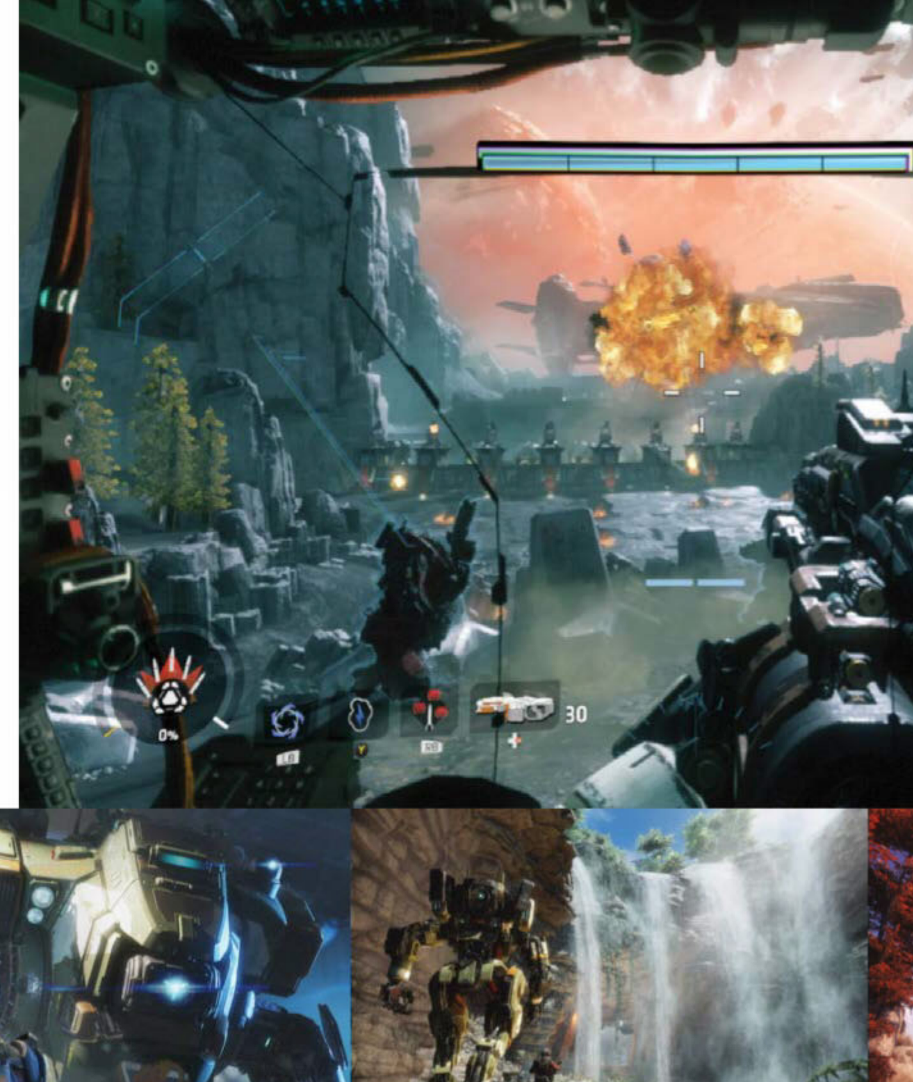
The AI grunts and spectres always had their place in multiplayer, in modes such as Attrition and Hardpoint, acting as idiotic cannon fodder for trigger happy pilots looking to ease the wait on their next titan to fall. But when you aren't worrying about enemy pilots bounding across rooftops, when the gratification of seeing your titan crashing through the clouds is removed from the campaign entirely, you're left with an experience that borders on banal. Encounters with enemy AI are haphazard at best in single-player; routine firing exercises against practise dummies, and they fail to foster the enticing engagements that we've come to expect from *Titanfall*.

That isn't to say it's all bad, though. While many of the genre staples are represented here – dull corridors crammed with a litany of static enemies and bizarrely flat, open spaces that fail to play to the strengths of your manoeuvrability and momentum – there are certainly moments where Respawn's defiance and ingenuity as a developer shines through. Though these moments are, controversially for an FPS, when *Titanfall 2* is confident enough to let you forget about firing your weapon and focus on the real enemy, the environments. On rare occasion, *Titanfall 2* stops being an FPS game and transforms into a first-person puzzle platformer. And when it does, it is *stunning* – standing on the precipice of being something truly special, genre defining.

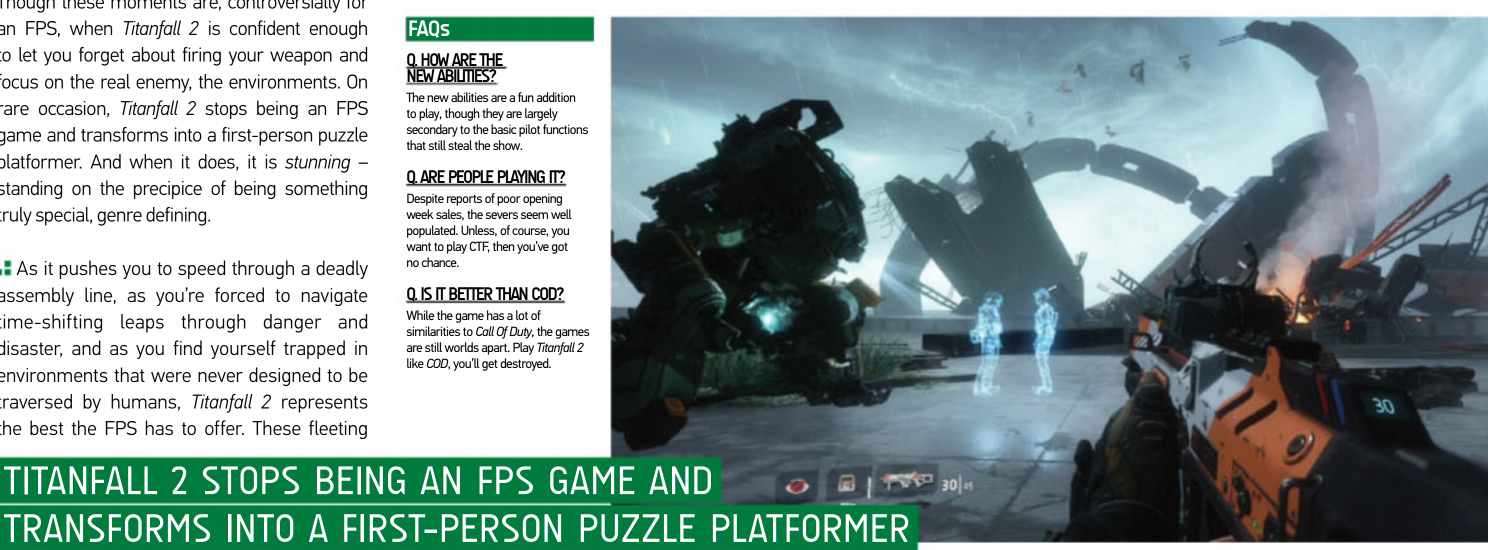
As it pushes you to speed through a deadly assembly line, as you're forced to navigate time-shifting leaps through danger and disaster, and as you find yourself trapped in environments that were never designed to be traversed by humans, *Titanfall 2* represents the best the FPS has to offer. These fleeting

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
ORIGIN: PS4, PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: Respawn Entertainment
PRICE: £44.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



Below: The charming interactions between protagonist Jack Cooper and the ever-adorable Titan BT-7274 are a constant high-point in an otherwise messy narrative riddled with poor dialogue, questionable voice acting and story beats that require knowledge of lore that simply doesn't exist.



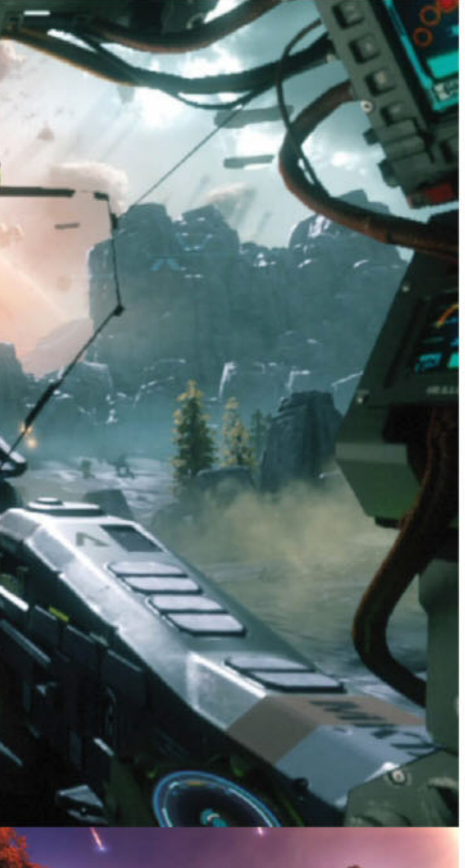
FAQs

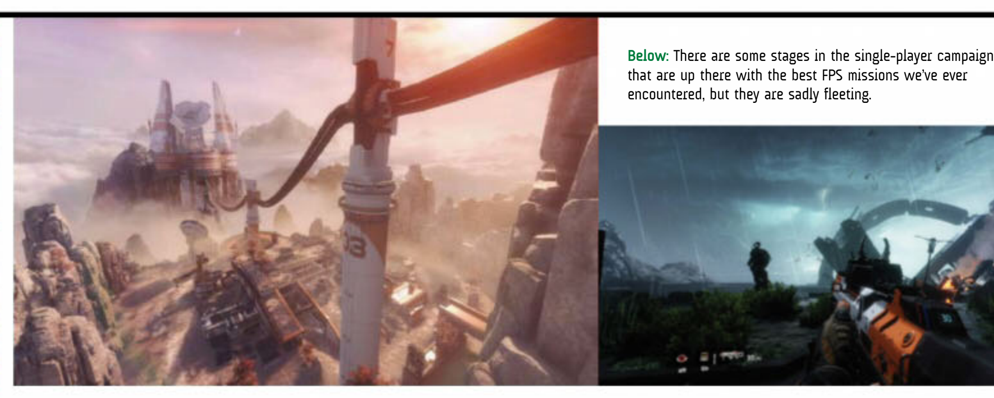
Q. HOW ARE THE NEW ABILITIES?
The new abilities are a fun addition to play, though they are largely secondary to the basic pilot functions that still steal the show.

Q. ARE PEOPLE PLAYING IT?
Despite reports of poor opening week sales, the severs seem well populated. Unless, of course, you want to play CTF, then you've got no chance.

Q. IS IT BETTER THAN COD?
While the game has a lot of similarities to *Call Of Duty*, the games are still worlds apart. Play *Titanfall 2* like *COD*, you'll get destroyed.

TITANFALL 2 STOPS BEING AN FPS GAME AND TRANSFORMS INTO A FIRST-PERSON PUZZLE PLATFORMER





Below: There are some stages in the single-player campaign that are up there with the best FPS missions we've ever encountered, but they are sadly fleeting.

Above: It's perhaps telling that the core members of this studio haven't contributed to the design of a single-player campaign since *Modern Warfare 2* back in '09.
Left: *Titanfall 2*'s campaign doesn't push you or the scope of your abilities to the fullest; it doesn't build playgrounds to let you play with some with some of the coolest toys ever introduced to an FPS.

moments are unlike anything you'll see from the competition, though it's a crying shame that it doesn't maintain that momentum throughout its entire six-hour campaign. Much like its predecessor, *Titanfall 2* excels once you gain some momentum. It does, after all, feature the slickest, smoothest and most responsive movement system ever committed to an FPS – to not design maps and engagements around this aspect of play is lunacy.

The decision to make the original *Titanfall* a multiplayer-only experience was always a huge point of contention for many players. Despite the obvious concerns surrounding content at launch, the campaign didn't quite work as intended. It was an interesting idea though, one that played to the strengths of the game's inventive power balance between pilot and titan, unique traversal system and blistering shooting mechanics – at least, it was for as long as those servers were populated.

Thankfully, the heart of the *Titanfall* experience is intact in multiplayer. Pilots are still afforded the freedom to be highly skilled masters of momentum, a stunning contrast to the lumbering titular titans that can change the face of combat in seconds, it's this dichotomy between manoeuvrability and power where *Titanfall 2* provides combat scenarios that simply aren't replicated anywhere else in the industry.

The biggest critical complaints in the refreshed multiplayer have been answered, some misinterpreted. While the basic focus is still on lightning fast encounters while running walls and navigating the environments with your suite of physics-breaking abilities, the game now features a vastly improved variety of loadout options and progression systems to keep players engaged and distracted. New pilot abilities, such as the introduction of a grappling hook and portable cover systems, allow for further specialisation, whereas each of the six new titans offers even more scope to customise and hone your skills and play style on the battlefields.

WORLDWIDE
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

PROGRESSION HEAVY: Thanks to improved progression and customisation systems, the longevity of *Titanfall* has been greatly improved.

While that's all fantastic for fostering longevity, the balance between pilots and titans has shifted, this is partly down to the map design. Many feel confined, comparatively flat and ultimately restrictive when held up against a number of standouts from the original game. *Titanfall* is at its best when you feel free to navigate – leaping between objects nimbly like an unstoppable force of nature, using towering verticality to your advantage as you take on titans and pilots alike – though so few of the maps seem to actively encourage this behaviour. Honestly, it's downright strange to see so many pilots on the ground, it's a god damned killing field for the vertically inclined.

Still, at its core, *Titanfall 2*'s multiplayer provides the same wild exhilaration in its moment-to-moment action that the original exhibited without deliberation or distraction. The action can still be fast and frantic, the visual and audio feedback between hits and headshots is essentially perfect, while the shooting is as tight and responsive as you could hope to see from a modern shooter. In spite of a few problems, *Titanfall 2* still provides an experience quite unlike any other and that's to be celebrated.

As a sequel, *Titanfall 2* is everything it was supposed to be. By extension, that means it isn't a game changer; it isn't as inventive or surprising as its predecessor, but then again, it couldn't be. *Titanfall* changed the trajectory of the FPS in a powerful and immediate way, and that success isn't to be simply re-created but iterated upon dutifully. Despite Respawn's best efforts, the game's obvious advancements and its spectacular engagement across multiplayer, *Titanfall 2* doesn't offer the same determined focus and balance that defined its predecessor.

BETTER THAN
BATTLEFIELD 1





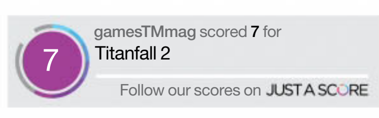
WORSE THAN
TITANFALL



PILOT VERSUS TITAN

Pilot effectiveness has been reduced against titans. The ability to rodeo a titan for a sensational kill has been minimised and battling more than one at a time (regardless of whether you're on foot or in a chassis) has been reduced. Titans have a better angle on the maps, leaving many rounds to be dominated by cloaked Snipers and huge machines through the closing minutes – with pilots left to simply wander the battlefield with a giant target painted on their back. Though this is, presumably, to push players into their titans. Respawn has spoken out in the past of its disappointment towards players leaving their mechs in auto-pilot, so perhaps opening up the maps and increasing the power of the titans was one way of turning the tide.

VERDICT
A LOT OF FUN BUT ULTIMATELY LACKS FOCUS





Above: Wall running returns and is a good way to keep opponents off balance and at a disadvantage in multiplayer.

A FUTURE WAR JUST LIKE THE OLD WAR

Call of Duty: Infinite Warfare

For years *Call Of Duty* has promoted an indulgence in adolescent fantasies regarding saving the world from cookie cutter evil, shooting first and asking questions later and engaging in unquestioned competition with our fellow man. It's a dream for those seeking to enter into a simplistically comforting, crass, conventional vision of good versus evil. *COD*'s primary reason for existing is to provide an instantly understandable and non-threatening form of escapism in which shooting and killing override any need to think.

And, over the years, franchise designers have performed an admirable job in delivering this vision. For certain, as the commercial success attests, *COD* is a skilfully crafted shooter in possession of enough self-awareness to consistently appeal to its target audience in incredible numbers. Unfortunately, however, *Infinite Warfare* fails to live up to the craftsmanship inherent to previous games. Developer Infinity Ward seems to be suffocated by the formula that it itself helped define, with typical *COD* moments falling flat and diversions into new territory being a complete failure.

The worst of the offending detours comes when you're asked, on frequent occasions, to pilot a small fighter spacecraft. Shooting down enemy ships and weaving between *Infinite Warfare*'s vision of the kinds of space stations humans are going to be commanding in future is an exercise in the mundane; the spectacle of lights and explosions illuminating the confines of your cockpit not managing, to any degree, to hide the lacklustre, inane core of the interaction demanded of you.

Put simply: you're barely interacting at all during these sequences. Press one button to lock on to a target, press another to kill them and occasionally hit a third to release protective flares. Whilst you're free to pilot your ship freely around the three-dimensional environment, the way enemies pop into view means you needn't bother. There's no tactical thought required and there's no feeling of reward after each successful sortie given the overriding feeling that you're barely doing anything.

Piloting the craft would be acceptable if was presented as a rarely seen novelty distraction from the shooting galleries that make up the rest of the game, but it's not. After the first outing the idea has outstayed its welcome and yet, like the end result of

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One/PC
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward
PRICE: £46.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1 (2-18 Online)
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

DEVELOPER INFINITY WARD SEEMS TO BE SUFFOCATED BY THE FORMULA THAT IT ITSELF HELPED DEFINE

FAQs

Q. DOWNLOAD SIZE OF GAME?

An enormous 88.5GB on PlayStation 4, offering the downloading of both *Infinite Warfare* and *Modern Warfare Remastered.*

Q. IS ZOMBIE MODE WORTHWHILE?

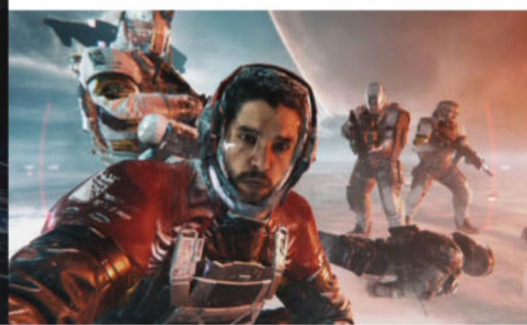
Yes, for a short while. The *Zombies in Spaceland* map is the best of the bunch, unshackling the art and writing teams and allowing them to have fun.

Q. GOOD ACTING PERFORMANCES?

Not especially. Kit Harington is as wooden here as he is in his role as Jon Snow and the novelty of Lewis Hamilton's voice is little better.



Below: There's little to complain about on a technical level, with visual fidelity, frame rates and online server stability all being as solid as you'd expect from a game enjoying this kind of production budget.



Below: Kit Harington plays the role of Salen Kotch, *Infinite Warfare*'s primary antagonist. Neither the character or the actor manages to make you care about the situation you find yourself in, though.

consuming food of questionable sanitation, it returns time and again to beat you into submission.

Gunplay adheres to the same pacing, ducking and covering of past games, despite additions designed to make you think the foundation of gameplay has progressed. New grenade and weapon types offer an aesthetic change, but do nothing to enhance the campaign structure offered in last year's *Black Ops III* and, as a result, the lack of evolution feels like a step backward.

There's nothing wrong with continuing to deliver a working formula, until the formula becomes so familiar that its inner workings are laid bare and it's no longer possible to suspend your disbelief. That's exactly what has happened here. No majesty exists across the events you're asked to engage with because it's so easy to accurately predict what kind of thing you're going to be asked to do next. There's no tension, no excitement, no payoff.

Campaign woes are compounded by a narrative wholly incapable of generating even the slightest degree of empathy from you. The idea of an off-world human settlement wanting independence from Earth is timely given the political and geopolitical events of today, but there's no subtlety or nuance to the way the message is presented and, certainly, there's no depth to its teachings. Still, as a series, *COD* has not been interested in asking questions of players or have them perform a critical analysis of their position in the world. Loud bangs and more guns are enough.

They were at one time, at least. More than any other entry in *COD* history, *Infinite Warfare* makes a compelling case for series change. There is so little of creative value here that it feels very much like the work of product manufacture over a piece of creative expression. It comes across as a game designed using the same focus testing practises used to develop shampoo or toilet roll. Infinity Ward might have tried to innovate through the flying sections, but their shallowness speaks to how it is likely impossible to change the course of a franchise so weighed down by success and the expectation of continuing the status quo.

Multiplayer fares slightly better simply because of the unpredictability inherent to entering killing arenas populated by real people shielded from actual harm by the abstraction offered by the internet. As usual there's a huge number of weapon and gadget combinations to choose from, with a diverse set of game modes available that tempt you into experimenting with new loadout options pretty regularly.

COD has always done a good job of providing something for everyone through its online component, and that remains true here unless you're the kind of player becoming fatigued by the presentation of these same options once again. At what point does a repeating set of 'diverse' options stop being diverse? Just like the campaign, *COD*'s multiplayer has seen a new lick of paint, but it's the same game as ever and it's becoming harder to get excited about it. Multiplayer continues to be enticing over the short term because of its entertaining player base, but the activities themselves have lost their shine.

Oh, and there's a zombie mode. The idea there is that you shoot things that look like how you feel when playing *Infinite Warfare*.

MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

COURAGE: There needs to be a greater emphasis on delivering courageous designs, otherwise *COD* is going to suddenly and quickly fall out of favour. Activision needs to pre-empt any dissatisfaction before this series loses the respect of its audience.

JOYS OF MODERN WARFARE

The inclusion of a remastered edition of 2007's *Modern Warfare* highlights just how lacklustre *Infinite Warfare* really is. Set piece moments continue to stand tall as some of the finest to grace a *COD* game and what character development there is outperforms that attempted in *Infinite Warfare*.

It's odd that the additionally packaged item should feel like the main event, not least because the events of *Modern Warfare* remain so familiar that they provide nothing in terms of shock factor or narrative interest. Despite the familiarity, though, there's enough positive nostalgia to make playing through the campaign worthwhile. Quite simply, this remaster is the best reason to spend your money here.

BETTER THAN

HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION



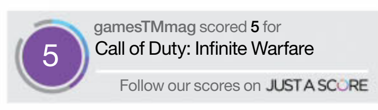
WORSE THAN



BATTLEFIELD 1

VERDICT

A SERIES SHOWING ITS AGE BY REFUSING TO EVOLVE



THERE'S ENOUGH FAMILIAR THAT IT WON'T TAKE MUCH EFFORT TO GET INVOLVED, BUT THERE ARE MANY SUBTLE TWEAKS

THE TURING TEST

It's been six 'full' games now, and still we're complaining about *Civilization*'s AI. Somehow it's even worse than before, since the addition of a hidden 'mayhem' coding means the enemy civilizations can often react rather recklessly in a bid to keep the game exciting. There are plenty of new design elements that keep your focus spread, which means this change to AI is just frustrating. There has to be a balance between forging relationships and having everyone declare war all the time, but now that a lot of the reasoning behind AI decisions has been brought into the interface it can feel more unfair than ever. At least when they leaders were unstable before it was hard to know what had caused it. AI really needs to be a focus of the series at some point soon, but sadly that hasn't happened here.



Above: Districts and limits on how and where you can build certain structures mean you have to plan each city's construction more effectively, rather than follow your tried-and-tested route as was the case with previous *Civ* games.



DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-8
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows 7 64-bit, 2.5 GHz quad core CPU, 4GB RAM, 1GB GPU, 12GB HDD space
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

WILL IT STAND THE TEST OF TIME?

Civilization VI

There's a rule, which you'll likely have heard in the run up to *Civilization VI*'s release, that each new game in the series must be one third new, one third improved and one third old. It's a noble idea, ensuring that the series – whose high-level gameplay concept hasn't really changed since its inception – is constantly improving beyond the aesthetic. It means we can always anticipate new mechanics, new features, and the potential promise of the best *Civ* game yet. Of course, the issue comes in *what* elements are changed, improved and added to and that, as is the case with this latest release, is never an easy task to figure out.

There has been much changed from *Civilization V* and regardless of whether you're a hardened veteran or a complete newcomer, there's going to be quite a bit you'll need to discover and rediscover. Settlers still construct cities, resources still exist and Workers – now called Builders – still enhance the terrain around you. There's enough familiar that it won't take much effort to get involved, but there are many subtle tweaks that mean the learning process takes a little longer than it did with *Civ V*. Brash new elements such as a city's districts are easy to tackle, so overtly new they are that they'll kick your frontal lobe into action. It's changes such as Happiness – no longer a global commodity but a local one termed Amenities – or the boosted tech research – a rework to the tried-and-tested tech tree format – which aren't properly explained, meaning you'll need to dip into the Civilopedia more than ever just to figure out what these new facets of gameplay are all about, and how exactly they can be utilised strategically. They're not objectively *worse* ways of handling concepts already seen in games prior, but their introduction ought to at least come with either a sense of intuitiveness or an explanation. Instead, *Civ VI* rarely offers either.

But, on the other hand, there are many changes that absolutely do make sense. Take city states for example; first appearing in *Civ V*, these neutral cities return here with a far greater sense of purpose and control. Now your command over a city state is handled via envoys, rather than an arbitrary reputation bar that was all too easy to manipulate in the last game. The system gives you little objectives to aim for, and though it's a little more cumbersome to manage – a criticism that works broadly for *Civ VI* as a whole – there's much more to pay attention to as you explore and expand.

By the same virtue, changes to the way technologies are learned also gives players something new to consider with each new discovery, even each new turn. Certain technologies are now included in the civic policy tech tree, for example, allowing you to essentially research two technologies at once. Taking certain actions can boost the research of certain technologies, such as how founding a city by the sea will enhance the speed with which you'll learn early naval technologies. It's a good system since it requires your play style to be reactive rather than predictive, resolving the issue of always playing by a predicated plan regardless of the way the dice fell. An issue, we should add, that wasn't really considered to be a problem in *Civilization* until this revelatory change.

This is a common thread throughout many of the *Civ VI*'s changes, in fact, such as the way certain Wonders can only be built under specific circumstances. An example is the Pyramids, which can now only be constructed on a desert tile; they're still a great early game Wonder, but you won't be able to rush towards their construction if your civilization is in the middle of a forest. The addition of districts ties into this new design too, and is as significant a change as one-unit-per-tile combat was in *Civilization V*. Where before it was enough to utilise the natural terrain, however you chose to enhance it, there was little interaction in doing so. Now players can select specific districts that will add certain benefits: a university built on a forest, for example, enhances scientific gain from the structure. In other situations choosing a certain building for a district might be a necessary strategy, such as adding a barracks to allow greater defence but also to gain access to a ranged attack on any aggressors from the district *as well as* the city centre. This would be more useful on your border cities, of course, and highlights the stronger sense of value each structure now has. It's not necessarily enough to build everything in every city whenever you can; instead you'll need to factor in each given city's needs, its location and its corresponding districts and structures too.

Mechanically *Civ VI* is one of the series' most intricate entries for a long while, adding in numerous little tweaks that will give franchise fans plenty to absorb. There are faults with some of these features, admittedly, while the AI in particular is especially frustrating. Steps have been taken to clarify the thought processes of your opposing civs, but this doesn't stop them being erratic, difficult to deal with, and at times just plain unfair. It's a shortcoming that does detract from the overall experience, but not quite enough to stop that 'one more turn' addiction from setting in all over again.

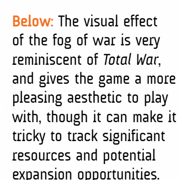
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

AI ISSUES: Poor AI has been a gripe in *Civ* for years, and *VI* has done nothing to improve it. Give us enemy factions capable of thinking beyond their immediate concerns and the series could really improve.



Above: Unsurprisingly the more cartoony visuals have been a point of contention for fans, but this is a series whose concept is a caricature of history anyway – such a graphical style is far more fitting for the game.



Below: The visual effect of the fog of war is very reminiscent of *Total War*, and gives the game a more pleasing aesthetic to play with, though it can make it tricky to track significant resources and potential expansion opportunities.



BETTER THAN: CIVILIZATION REVOLUTION 2

WORSE THAN: CIVILIZATION V

FAQs

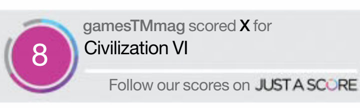
Q. OTHER CHANGES?
Civic technologies unlock, among other things, cards that can be applied to your civ for specific advantages.

Q. SUCH AS?
Well, a bonus to constructing early age Wonders, for example, or faster production of a certain type of military unit.

Q. REPLAYABLE?
Absolutely, more than ever before, even. It's almost impossible to follow your own personal favourite play style now, meaning you'll need to be reactive.

VERDICT

THE MOST REPLAYABLE CIV YET, BUT THE AI IS A DRAWBACK





Boss fights provide a welcome change of pace, it's just a shame that there are so few of them.

A SHADE OF ITSELF

Shadow Warrior 2

In the nicest way possible, *Shadow Warrior 2* is a shooter frozen in time. Full of macho characters, cheesy one-liners and relentlessly fast-paced action, this game is unapologetically stupid. Channelling the ghost of Nineties shooter's past, Devolver Digital's latest picks up where its predecessor left off, putting you back in the shoes of everyone's favourite walking dick joke, Lo Wang.

After getting mixed up with gangsters conducting twisted magical experiments, Wang soon finds the spirit of mob boss' daughter, Kamiko, trapped inside him, sending both characters on a quest to return her to her body. Featuring one-liners that would make even the seediest B-movie writers wince and a nonsensical plot, what could have been a fun story quickly becomes an annoyance.

Thankfully, the gameplay fares much better. The original's core mechanic makes a welcome return, once again allowing you to switch seamlessly between dispatching foes with your blade and filling them with lead. While the core combat remains intact, *Shadow Warrior 2*'s has undergone a few key changes. Doing away with the linear missions of its predecessor, players are now let loose on more open environments, adding a welcome element of exploration and verticality to missions.

Thanks to an enjoyable selection of magical abilities and the sense of speed offered by Wang's ninja-powered dash, combat manages to feel exhilarating throughout the game's 12-hour duration. As you progress through the game's main missions and side quests, you will find yourself unlocking a wide range of weapons ranging from standard fare like Uzis to magic-powered, double-bladed chainsaws. With over 70 unique weapons to discover *Shadow Warrior 2* ensures that you're always anticipating your next instrument of death.

Each shiny killing machine can also be equipped with three gems, imbuing them with magical damage, additional ammo or a wide range of other upgrades. Generously, the game also allows you to have eight different weapons equipped at any one time - and with good reason. As you encounter enemies with varied elemental types, it's essential to infuse weapons with different elements and attributes to ensure that you can hold your own.

It's this cycle of constantly upgrading and discovering new weapons that keeps the shooting feeling fresh. Unfortunately, the game's enemies and environments feel anything but, thanks to developers Flying Wild Hog recycling several over and over. Without a strong story to fall back on, these elements simply feel cheap.

This is a sequel that opts for refinement rather than reinvention, keeping the original's core but adding a slight modern twist. There's fun to be had here, but fans of no-nonsense shooters can do better.

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

MULTIPLAYER: *Shadow Warrior 2* allows you to tackle missions with up to three others, leaving you free to play with all your friends' Wangs.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: PlayStation 4, Xbox One
ORIGIN: Poland
PUBLISHER: Devolver Digital
DEVELOPER: Flying Wild Hog
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now (PC) Q1 2017 (console)
PLAYERS: 1-4
MINIMUM SPEC: Windows 7/8/8.1/10 x64, Intel Core i3-6300 (2 * 3800) or AMD A10-5800K APU (4 * 3800) or equivalent, 8GB RAM, GeForce GT 560Ti (1GB) or Radeon HD 6850 (1GB) or better
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

HOMEFRONT: THE REVOLUTION



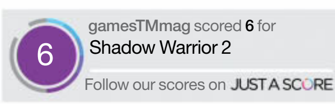


DOOM

WORSE THAN

VERDICT

FUN AND FRANTIC, BUT SOON GROWS TIRESOME



IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

Dragon Quest Builders

Some of us can't just open a box of Lego and build a masterpiece, and the things we do build are often an incoherent mess. Sometimes we need blueprints, direction and sometimes we just want to be *told* how to build the Millennium Falcon. The same problem can translate to *Minecraft*, the *Lego* of videogames, and this is where *Dragon Quest Builders* comes bounding over the horizon, with the Mojang playbook in one hand and a hefty list of instructions in the other to help us out.

It works, too. *DQB* brings many thoughtful quality-of-life changes to the *Minecraft* formula: crafting recipes are learned upon discovery of a material and are accessible from anywhere. It makes it easier, sure, but it diverts focus from inventory management and having to look crafting recipes up online to the things that matter: exploration, actually building things and, of course, doing the game's various NPCs bidding.

Throughout your journey, you'll build settlements, which attract villagers and you will have to fix their problems. These can range from discovering the way to make burgers, to retrieving artefacts from faraway islands and improving your settlement's defences. While these tasks can seem like a nuisance, they're not without purpose: they actually do a fantastic job at educating you in the game's fundamental systems. Finishing Chapter One feels like graduating from Crafting School, which is handy because that's when you unlock the sandbox-like Terra Incognita Island as a reward.

Here you can create, quest-free, however only in solitude – *Dragon Quest Builders* has no true multiplayer component. You can share creations with other like-minded architects, and there's some fun to be had in seeing what other people with the game's engine do, but it's no replacement for building a replica of King's Landing in real time with a friend.

You don't really *need* a friend to help you, though. Thanks to *Dragon Quest Builder*'s intuitive and easy-to-use approach to its systems you can practically build Rome in a day anyway, and have a right old fun time doing it. You can modify dirt blocks into bricks with a special item, for example, so you can construct the outline of your building and turn it into a masterpiece with ease. The only real glaring flaw, outside of the stark lack of *real* multiplayer, is that the game is confined by its third-person camera, making navigating any small, enclosed areas tough.

Minecraft taught us that you can present a world to a player and they'll make their own story, *Dragon Quest Builders* offers that and more, all without the need of an online crafting guide or book.



DETAILS

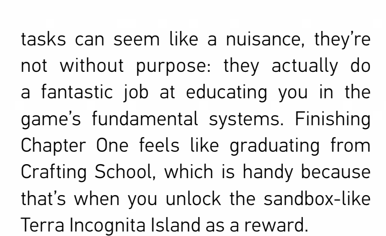
FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: PS3, PS Vita
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: £49.99 (£29.99 Vita)
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

SYNTHESIS

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER



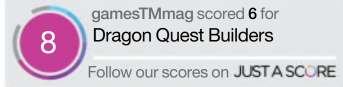

MINEQUESTRIA – *DQB* blends voxel-based gathering and building of *Minecraft*, the lite-adventure gameplay of *Terraria* with traditional JRPG questing, giving the game an overarching story revolving around rebuilding the world after a cataclysmic disaster.





VERDICT

A SERIOUS CONTENDER TO THE VOXEL THRONE





Above: The game's bosses are actually well handled and require you to utilise a certain item against them, the battles almost feel like they've come straight from a *The Legend Of Zelda* title.



SHOWING A LOT OF CHARACTER

Football Manager 2017

As is to be expected at this point, buying *Football Manager 2017* represents you essentially taking on a full-time job for no pay, let alone annual leave or other benefits. If you happen to have a job already or be in full-time education, sacrifices are going to have to be made. Managing a football club (digitally, in this case) will creep up and consume you swiftly, and before you know it you've chalked up 500 hours of deliciously stress-inducing micro management, contract negotiations and incendiary cup ties.

This is strategy at its best, really, and we don't use that word to describe *Football Manager* enough. For all the delight it takes in forcing you to pore over stats, spreadsheets and your email inbox – because, clearly, you don't do that enough every day as it is – this is a reactive, logical experience much like a more traditional strategy title, real-time or otherwise. Decisions made during down time midweek, during the regular pre-match press conferences (that do, admittedly, become a little tiresome as the season wears on) and mid game will directly impact your success.

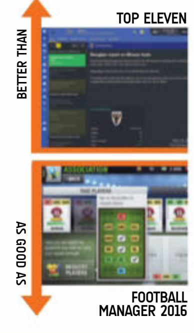
Most of the time, that is. We experienced a few odd results in the time we spent with the game – playing as AFC Bournemouth, we went from being hammered in the cup by a lower league side to beating Everton 7-0 at Goodison Park within a week of the first game. Later in the season, we were 5-0 down to West Ham at half time, before changing a couple of tactics and miraculously winning 8-5. Eight goals in one half. Strange things happen in football, but we suspect there's more scripting going on in *Football Manager 2017* than meets the eye.

Still, we're nitpicking, and this veiled scripting doesn't rear its head so much as to spoil the experience, and there's so much of this game that's completely under player control that it would be harsh to deny the game a modicum of control of its own. In this vein, the game often only throws up seemingly random events to challenge you in the same way that real life would. There's no way to predict when a player might get injured or Bayern Munich decide to outbid you for your top transfer target.

This is all part of *Football Manager's* considerable charm. The standard Career mode is as complex and accomplished as ever – although some of you might worry about the lack of real changes since last year's outing – and a fairly recent addition, Fantasy Draft, is a superb way to kill a few hours with a friend online, pitting you against each other following a lengthy draft on a set budget. There's a lot to see and do, and eternity to do it in. Get used to not having time for anything else.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
OTHER FORMATS: Mac, Linux
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: Sports Interactive
PRICE: £34.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
MINIMUM SPEC: 2.2GHz CPU or higher, Windows Vista/Mac OS X 10.7.5 or newer, 2GB RAM, GPU with 2GB VRAM, 3GB free storage for install
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes



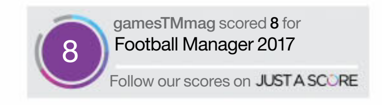
MISSING LINK

WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

EMAIL OF THE EVENING: The amount of emails you get in *FM17* starts to become a strain after 20 or so hours. These could be stripped back – however realistic, a game still needs to be fun.

VERDICT

A DEEP, REWARDING AND ADDICTIVE EXPERIENCE

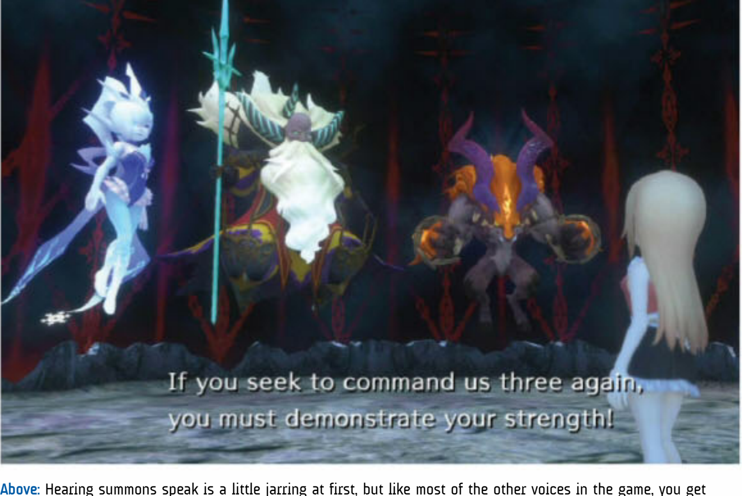






Above: The game engine has come along massively in the last few years, making for a very watchable 90 minutes of action if you want to take advantage of it. We still have a soft spot for the nostalgia of the text page.





Above: Hearing summons speak is a little jarring at first, but like most of the other voices in the game, you get used to it after a little while. Some (Odin) are generally better than others (Bahamut), though.

CLOUD, THUNDAGA AND LIGHTNING

World Of Final Fantasy

As was always going to be the case with something like this that brings together so many popular characters, it's the newcomers that let the side down. The brother-and-sister duo of Lann and Reynn are moulded out of pure cliché, a headstrong buffoon and a reluctant know-it-all out to... do something. While not quite *Kingdom Hearts* levels of convoluted, the story is a bit of a mess. A simpler narrative would have helped, as it's hard to care about these two generic protagonists when every peak moment of excitement is related to the arrival of a familiar face, which is why the standalone Intervention missions – 'what if' scenarios packed with former *FF* stars in ludicrous situations – fare much better.

It's not just the siblings that grate, however. If you thought having Moogles end every sentence with 'kupo' was annoying, WOFF's companion character Tama will push you over the edge – her superfluous use of the word 'the' makes some passages quite hard to follow. While that's really irritating, it's worth noting the general writing and localisation is really good, especially written content such as bestiary descriptions that often see the series poking fun at itself, its peers and the genre in general. Diehard fans will love picking out the best disguised of these references, and there are loads on top of all the visual and audio nods to past games.

Solid (if somewhat easy later on) combat mechanics also make up for shortcomings elsewhere, with the stack system presenting some interesting tactical possibilities. Settling on the right teams is tough with so many new creatures thrown at you, plus the generally slow levelling rate means you're often better off just sticking with a familiar and already powerful team rather than injecting new blood and having to grind out XP all over again just to get back to where you were. With *XV* moving further away from turn-based combat and the *VII* remake going that way too, just having a new menu-driven *Final Fantasy* game in 2016 is another layer of fan service beyond the obvious.

Its style and attitude see it targeting a niche within a niche – existing *FF* fans willing to accept a more playful celebration of the franchise rather than the straight-faced ensemble in something like *Dissidia* – but even if you don't get on board with the chibi characters at first, persist. Whichever *FF* is your favourite, it's hard to stay mad at the inane banter or doll-like characters when an amazing remix of a classic theme kicks in. Seriously, fight on.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Vita
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Square Enix
DEVELOPER: Tose/ Square Enix
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: Yes

BETTER THAN

FINAL FANTASY X-2





FINAL FANTASY XIII-2

WORSE THAN

FINGERPRINT

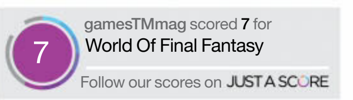
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

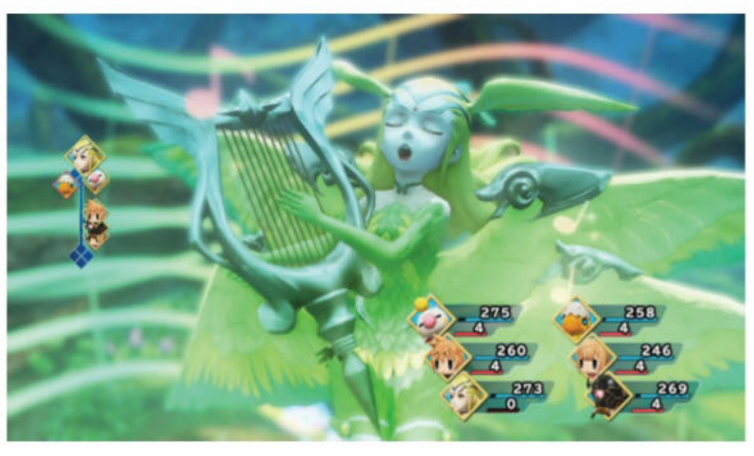
CHARACTER BUILDING: Parties can be formed of up to six characters, with the stipulation that they must be fused into 'Stacks' consisting of one small, one medium and one large creature. Skills, weaknesses and resistances are combined, so picking complementary characters is crucial when battles (eventually) get tougher.

VERDICT



FAN SERVICE DONE RIGHT





Below: Stacking units offers plenty of depth to combat, but it actually limits flexibility as well – unstacking isn't viable in tougher fights as the individual monsters are typically too weak and squishy to be effectual.



CREATE YOUR OWN HERO

Skylanders: Imaginators



***Skylanders* has quietly become one of the most dependable series in the industry.** For kids, it's the gateway game, a twist on the classic *Diablo* formula that presents itself with a smile instead of a snarl. For parents, well, they can once again depend on it being engaging enough to empty out the bank account the wrong side of Christmas. But that's *Skylanders* for you: another year, another gimmick, another cast of purchasable characters and, of course, another game that's difficult to ignore.

On the surface, *Imaginators* should be a fairly standard action-platformer, especially when held up against the imaginative *SuperChargers* and *Trap Team* offerings of years gone bye. Thankfully, returning developer Toys For Bob has imbued this year's title with more RPG elements than ever before. We're talking genre staples such as full character customisation, stat-based gear/weapons and even tiered loot drops. It's less intensive than anything we are typically used to, but it's there all the same.

As an adult, used to dealing with stats and loot drops from years of playing the likes of *Diablo II* to *Destiny*, it'll seem so rudimentary you'll struggle to see where the engagement lies. Play it with a kid, however, and you'll see their eyes light up at the many degrees of interaction and customisation. So frequent are the loot drops that it's easy to stop continuously while new body parts, catchphrases and weapons are switched in and out. The loot drop system is wildly unbalanced, with high-level gear dropping early enough that there's very little reason to tinker with your character after just a handful of hours – but try explaining that to a kid.

Six games into the *Skylanders* series and you'd expect to see fatigue set in. To see the creativity dry up and cynicism step in, the demand for your cash seeping into every one of the new game systems. But to Activision's credit, once you've got yourself a Creation Crystal – a physical toy that allows you to digitally house one of your created-from-scratch Skylanders – you are relatively free to tinker, play and experiment to your heart's content.

Of course, with each Crystal only able to house one specific element (which will dictate your character's class across broad genre archetypes), you'll find that you made a fairly big gameplay decision before you've had a chance to really dig in to the play itself. Essentially, if you want to experience the game as different classes or feel that you made a mistake early on, you'll need to get yourself another Creation Crystal.

But that's *Skylanders* for you. This is a series that has always had you buy new toys to experience larger parts of the game, and *Imaginators* is simply the next evolution of that format.

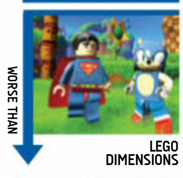
DETAILS

FORMAT: PS4
OTHER FORMATS: Xbox One, PS3, X360, Wii U
ORIGIN: USA
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Toys For Bob
PRICE: £49.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: No

BETTER THAN

SKYLANDERS SUPERCHARGERS





WORSE THAN

LEGO DIMENSIONS

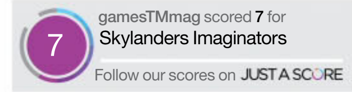
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

GOT CLASS: the ability to create your own character from scratch and play in this wide-spanning world is quite the delight.

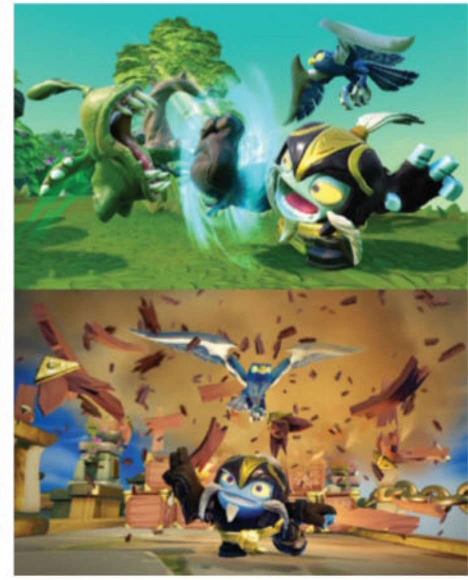
VERDICT

A WHIMSICAL EVOLUTION OF THE BEAT 'EM UP





Above: Imaginators leans heavily on its heritage as a beat 'em up, even going as far as to introduce Crash and Cortex as playable characters. It's great to see them back in action, even if they are relegated to another franchise.



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox One
OTHER FORMATS: PC, PS4
ORIGIN: Norway
PUBLISHER: Curve Digital
DEVELOPER: Perfectly Paranormal
PRICE: £7.99
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

I AM BREAD





OCTODAD: DADLIEST CATCH

WORSE THAN

SOME SIGNS OF RIGOR MORTIS

Manual Samuel

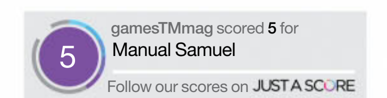
There's much to admire about *Manual Samuel*, but, unfortunately, this tale of a man having to manually control his body for a second chance at life doesn't live up to its potential. There are three key reasons for this: First, the control inputs are not sensitive enough, meaning your all-important manual controls can often slip. Second, while the core idea is strong and it teases the concept of convincing others you're alive, it doesn't really challenge or offer enough scenarios to really enjoy. Third, it's not as funny as it wants to be.

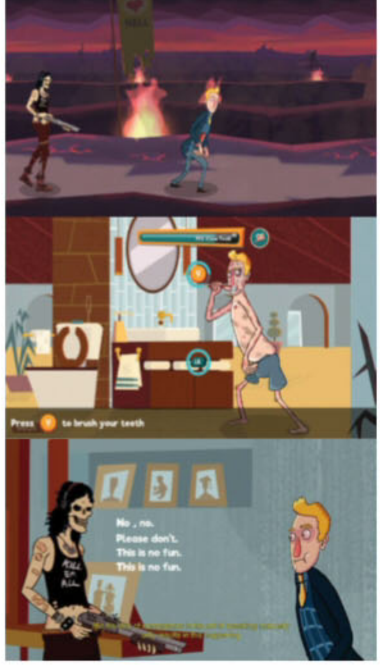
The humour thing is tough of course. Everyone is going to have a different take on whether it pays off. Mechanical deficiencies are more clear-cut. A certain amount of clunkiness is to be expected and perhaps even required in order to sell the concept of manually controlling a guy's breathing, walking and blinking. But we began to notice that the game needed us to hold a beat between inputs sometimes in order to recognise them. When things intensify a little towards the end, these lapses begin to creep in and frustrate, as if listening to Death whine on about kick-flips wasn't annoying enough.

What ends up being most disappointing though is that *Manual Samuel* doesn't follow through hard enough on its own concept. It's a relatively brief game, and as such doesn't really explore all the potential of the concept. The promise that you'll need to convince others of your biomechanically operational status never really comes to pass. What emerges is something closer to a point-and-click adventure, but not one with enough depth to really impress. *Manual Samuel* has a lot of promise, great art style, good music and some excellent ideas, but its execution is often as limp as Sam's spine.



TOO INCONSISTENT TO TRULY SHINE





Above: Small moments like not breathing in while eating or brushing your teeth for fear of starting a choking fit add some fun body humour to the game, but we would have liked to see a lot more of this sort of thing.

CAUGHT IN A JAM

Maximum Car

If nothing else, *Maximum Car* manages to ride the fine line between annoying and exhilarating rather well on a number of fronts. Inspired by the classic action racing feel of *Burnout*, squeezed through the lens of voxelart design, it keeps its tongue firmly in its cheek with its adrenaline-fuelled racing and gruff announcer feedback, but it can still frustrate.

It's not helped by the longevity of its in-app purchase model. As a free download you can enjoy the endless racer mode as much as you want, drifting around corners, using missiles against cars and boosting your way between oncoming traffic for as long as possible. But the more engaging side of the game is the mission mode, which offers limited play time based on tokens that refresh over several hours or can be purchased via the store. It costs £3.99 to unlock infinite tokens in the game.

It's an understandable move, giving you something to wile away the hours in endless mode and something more direct and focused but paid for through the missions, but it feels just a little on the heavy-handed side, breaking the flow of what is otherwise a fun if simple action racing game. The voiceover can be a little annoying with its odd asides and tone, the music over the top an endless grind of guitar, but there's a great sense of reverence for the genre and the input of tapping on the left and right of the screen to steer means it's very easy to play.

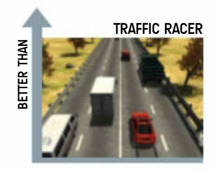
Maximum Car offers a lot to enjoy if you either have the patience to wait for tokens to load or want to drop the of money it's asking for. That it seems to be pushing you a little heavily down the route of in-app purchases is going to grate on many and we're kind of with those that feel that way. But the core experience is nonsensical and fast enough to be a fun distraction that's done a great job of translating the fundamentals of *Burnout* to touchscreen devices.

DETAILS

FORMAT: iOS
OTHER FORMATS: Android
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: I Fight Bears, tea&cheese
DEVELOPER: In-house
PRICE: Free
RELEASE: Out now
PLAYERS: 1
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

BETTER THAN

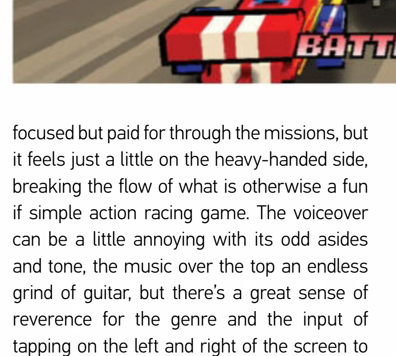
TRAFFIC RACER





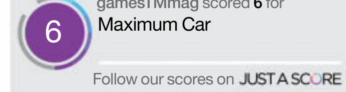
ASPHALT 8: AIRBORNE

WORSE THAN





SIMPLE, FUN, BUT POTENTIALLY ANNOYING





“I’ve always been a big fan of MMOs but World Of Warcraft just has a personality and character to it that draws me in like no other MMO ever has”

DAVID PELLAS, STUDIO DIRECTOR, RAVEN SOFTWARE

WHY I ❤...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

DAVID PELLAS, STUDIO DIRECTOR , RAVEN SOFTWARE

“My favourite game of all time is World Of Warcraft*, it engages me like no other game. I’ve always been a big fan of MMOs but* World Of Warcraft *just has a personality and character to it that draws me in like no other MMO ever has.*

"It also helps that our studio head, Brian Raffle, is also a big World Of Warcraft *fan. We play a lot together, and obviously we work very closely together anyway, but it’s nice to have that camaraderie with the team not just on the game we’re working on but also outside of work we still want to hangout and do things together. It’s that connection that really means a lot to me. Plus, it helps that* Legion *might just be the best expansion that Blizzard has ever made.”*



RETRO

NO.181



90

RETRO GUIDE TO… AMSTRAD

It couldn't compete with the big boys, but its games lineup was still something to envy. How many of these greats did you play?

BEHIND THE SCENES

96 STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON II: ROGUE LEADER

A visual powerhouse on the GameCube, we take a closer look at its creation with the team that made it

INTERVIEW

102 SOREN JOHNSON

The story of *Civilization* isn't only about Sid Meier. We chat with another key architect of the series' success

GAME CHANGERS

106 DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

A milestone moment for Rare, a revolution in graphics for 16-bit consoles and the game that resurrected an iconic hero

DISCUSS | Have your say on all things retro on our dedicated forum **www.gamestm.co.uk/forum**

THE RETRO GUIDE TO… AMSTRAD CPC 486

Lord Sugar's budget computer might have trailed behind its peers, but it still had plenty of great games to discover

THE SUCCESS OF the Commodore and Spectrum saw other companies take note and it wasn't long before Amstrad entered the market with its own range of computers. Unlike their competitors, they typically launched with green or coloured monitors and built-in cassette decks, giving them quite an advantage due to many people only having a single television in the household.

Although it had a massive following in France, and the UK, lazy Spectrum ports and a lack of killer exclusives meant that Amstrad's machine trailed behind its competitors and it went on to sell just over three million units across its entire range. We're focusing on the original tape-based CPC 464 here and focusing on those titles that really made the machine sing. How many of the following classics did you experience?

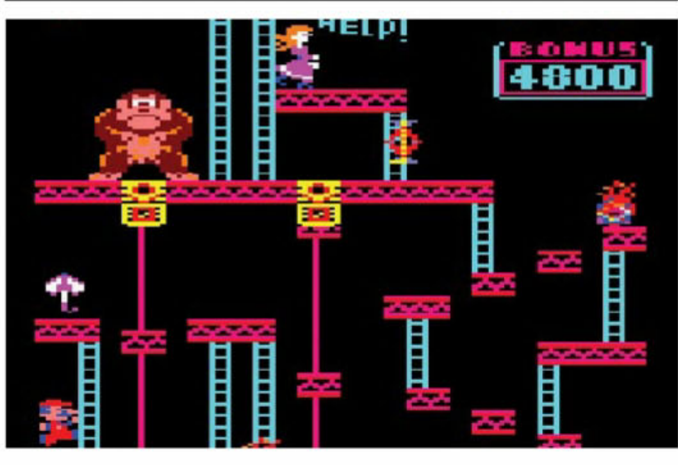




SORCERY 1985

THE GANG OF FIVE

It was hard going for Amstrad in the early days, with many gamers content with their Spectrums and C64s. *Sorcery* was one of the first exclusives that proved the Amstrad was more than capable of delivering in the software stakes, and even today, it looks absolutely phenomenal thanks to its beautiful chunky visuals and slick scrolling (for an Amstrad game). The actual gameplay is rather simplistic, requiring you to have the relevant item to unlock the captured wizards, but it plays exceptionally well and has a tough, but fair difficulty level. An update, *Sorcery +*, was later released for the CPC 6128.



DONKEY KONG 1986

OCEAN SOFTWARE

There are far too many great Amstrad arcade conversions to feature here, so we're going to concentrate on only covering the cream of the crop. *Donkey Kong* is the cherry proudly perched atop all the delicious cream, and it remains perhaps the best conversion of the game from its time period.

Ocean's port is staggeringly good. It retains the original ratio of the arcade coin-op, has extremely similar aesthetics and even manages decent sound effects. The collision detection feels spot on, but more importantly, it features every single level of the arcade game, a feat even Nintendo's own 8-bit console couldn't manage. A truly outstanding arcade port that still manages to impress today.



BACTRON 1986

LORICIELS

The Amstrad is a haven for isometric games and this one is a doozy. Taking place in a human body, you must navigate the poorly human, whilst looking for yellow enzymes to activate and avoid the numerous viruses that are trying to stop you. It's all finished off with great music and stunning animation.



A BRIEF INTERVIEW WITH JIM BAGLEY

The veteran developer talks Amstrad gaming

What benefits did the Amstrad offer over its peers?

The Amstrad had the ability to put any of the 16 colours from a palette of 27 in any pixel on screen. There were also no attributes like on the Commodore 64 and Spectrum.

Why were so many Amstrad ports similar to their Spectrum counterparts?

I guess the majority of Amstrad ports were similar to their Spectrum counterparts probably because they were written by the same person who did the Spectrum version. Also the sprite sizes and coding would be the same on the Spectrum, compared to taking the C64 art, so unfortunately for Amstrad users it makes for a faster port. For the likes of the games I had to port to Amstrad, the artist did a mega quick conversion to four colours so they could get onto starting the next Spectrum game.

What's the best Amstrad game you've played and why?

That's a tough one to answer. I have three favourite Amstrad games (well according to me anyway) *Ikari Warriors*, *Bomb Jack*, and *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. It's mainly because they were written for the Amstrad, rather than ported from the Spectrum version to the Amstrad.

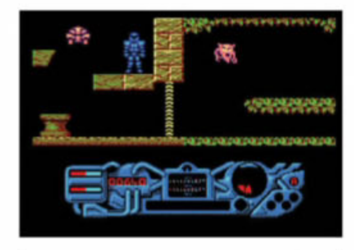
Why do you think the Amstrad was less popular than the Commodore 64 and the Spectrum?

I'd say because it was expensive because it also came with a monitor unlike the Spectrum and C64, which you could use with your existing TV.

THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD 1986

PALACE SOFTWARE

■ This remarkable effort from Palace Software came out the same year as Nintendo's *Metroid* and is a very similar game (although it was created with no knowledge of the Nintendo title). Playing as a warrior named Tal, you initially only have access to throwing rocks, but as you unlock parts of the titular armour, the game world slowly opens up. The original release came with an impressive 16-page comic by graphic artist, Daniel Malone, while its name was changed to the rather naff *Rad Warrior* for its US release.





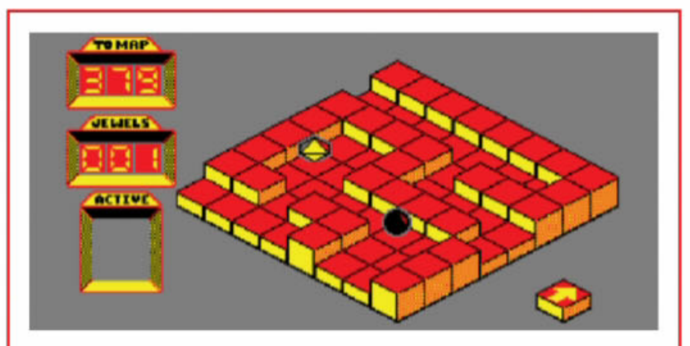
STARGLIDER 1986

ARGONAUT SOFTWARE

■ Jez San loved playing the arcade version of *Star Wars* so much he created his own unofficial version. Although originally created for 16-bit home computers, *Starglider* was no slouch on the CPC, either, and it ran at a very impressive pace. It's a simple shoot-'em-up at heart, just like the game it's based on in fact, but that doesn't take anything away from its hectic and addictive gameplay.







SPINDIZZY 1986

ELECTRIC DREAMS SOFTWARE

■ This isometric gem from Paul Shirley was a harmonious merging of action and puzzle gameplay and sees you controlling a unique device that can transform between three distinctive forms. You have to navigate the sprawling game world against a tight time limit, which can be extended by collecting gems. *Spindizzy* used basic physics to help enhance its puzzles, but also used ramps, jumps and other obstacles to ensure its gameplay always felt fresh on each play through. Hugely popular on release, *Spindizzy*'s success resulted in a sequel, *Spindizzy Worlds*, in 1990. Sadly, it never materialised on the Amstrad.

GET DEXTER 1986

REMI HERBULOT

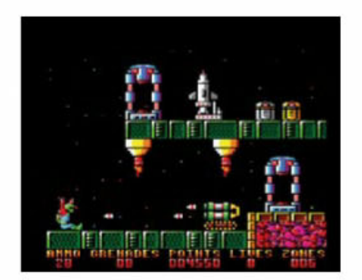
■ This started off life as an Amstrad exclusive, before eventually getting ported to the Atari ST in 1987. Created by Remi Herbulot when he was still a teenager *Get Dexter* is a fun isometric adventure with a heavy emphasis on puzzle solving that still holds up well today. Unlike many isometric Amstrad games, which looked like slightly enhanced Spectrum ports, *Get Dexter* offered sensational visuals that were bright and chunky and exceptionally animated. It was no slouch in the puzzle department either, with plenty of clever head scratchers that never outstayed their welcome. Known in France as *Crafton & Xunk*, it's a wonderfully surreal little game that was succeeded by a less impressive sequel in 1988.

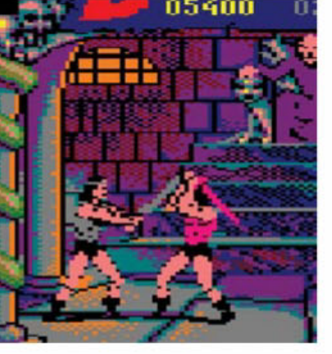
"GET DEXTER IS A FUN ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE WITH A HEAVY EMPHASIS ON PUZZLE SOLVING"

EXOLON 1987

RAFFAELE CECCO

■ Raffaele Cecco did some amazing work on the Amstrad, and *Exolon* is one of his best efforts. *Exolon* is an incredibly vibrant run-and-gun that sees your lone fighter trying to navigate 25 screens of absolute carnage with just his wits, lasers and missiles to rely on.





BARBARIAN 1987

PALACE SOFTWARE

■ We were all set to include *The Way Of The Exploding Fist* here, until we remembered that *Barbarian* allows you to chop people's heads off! While it's extremely gruesome and clearly inspired by the *Conan* movies, it's a great fighter to boot, with a solid range of special moves and exceptional animation. Page 3's Maria Whittaker and that bloke who played Wolf in *Gladiators* starred on its controversial cover.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN MONTY 1987

GREMLIN GRAPHICS

Several *Monty* games appeared on the CPC, but this remains our favourite. It's a classic platformer where Monty must travel around Europe collecting enough money so that he can retire on the island of Montos. Some of the European caricatures feel a little suspect in today's climate, but there's nothing wrong with its tight responsive gameplay and clever level design.



GUILD OF THIEVES 1987

MAGNETIC SCROLLS

Guild Of Thieves is quite simply the best graphic adventure that you can play on the CPC 464 thanks to its expansive parser, humorous dialogue and genuinely challenging puzzles. Set in the same enchanting world as its predecessor, *The Pawn*, *Guild Of Thieves* sees you trying to get into the titular guild by amassing as much loot as possible, as well as interacting with some extremely memorable characters.





TRANTOR THE LAST STORMTROOPER 1987

PROBE SOFTWARE

Prior to making a fortune selling Gaikai, David Perry was a superb 8-bit coder who dabbled in various systems before founding Shiny Entertainment. This rather swish effort was turned around in a manner of months, and is an excellent port of Nick Bruty's original Spectrum game. It's a classic run-and-gun with sensational looking visuals, great weapons and lots of scary monsters to battle. It's admittedly light on content, but a ridiculous amount of fun all the same.







A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH MIKE LAMB



What were the Amstrad's strengths compared to its 8-bit peers?

First, individual pixel colour addressing. Second, more memory, though to be honest you really needed it because the graphics took far more space than other systems. Third, [it had] a monitor, keyboard and floppy disk built-in. In theory these shouldn't really matter for games but it made developing for it a whole lot nicer.

Why were there so many inferior Amstrad ports of Spectrum games created for the system?

Simple: time and money.

Why do you think the games of Ocean Software were so popular with Amstrad owners at the time?

They could expect decent sales on most of their big licensed titles so it made a lot more sense to spend [more time on Amstrad] development. John Brandwood (also known as Johnny Amstrad) set the standard at Ocean Software for CPC work. He also developed graphics and compression tools that the rest of us used.

What do you consider your very best Amstrad game and why?

I would pick my Arkanoid conversion because the game didn't need scrolling and the graphics made it much better looking than the other available versions.

Any Amstrad game you wished you'd worked on?

Easily, *Renegade*. John Brandwood and Mark Jones did a great job with it.

HEAD OVER HEELS 1987

OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ Jon Ritman's follow-up to isometric adventure *Batman* remains one of his best loved games. Unlike many games of the time, play is split between two distinct characters, Head and Heels, who each have unique abilities. It's a great concept, helped further by a huge sprawling game world and some truly deviously designed stages that require a fair amount of head-scratching to solve. It's full of great humour, too, thanks to excellent sprite work by long-time Ritman collaborator Bernie Drummond.



RENEGADE 1987

OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ This remains one of the greatest beat-em-ups on Amstrad's console. It's a cracking port of the original Technos coin-op and another excellent piece of coding from Mike Lamb, who also worked on the equally exceptional *Robocop*. Spread across several levels, *Renegade* features the same three-way button setup of the coin-op, which not everyone could get to grips with. Master it, though, and you'll find yourself able to pull off all sorts of brutal moves, including a deadly knee to your opponent's groin. It was followed up by an equally solid sequel called *Target; Renegade*. The less said about *Renegade 3: The Final Chapter*, the better.

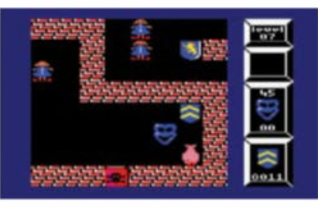


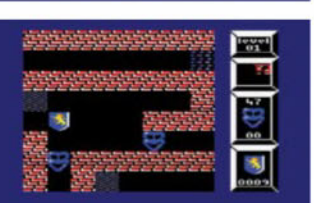


XOR 1987

ASTRAL SOFTWARE

■ This intriguing maze game was released on a number of systems, but the Amstrad port is easily our favourite. The aim of the game is relatively simple: traverse a maze and capture all the masks found there with your two shields, Magus and Questor. Initially, you simply have to deal with force fields, which can only be entered by a certain direction. However as the game progresses, chickens, fish and other dangerous hazards come into play. It's tricky but oh so satisfying when you finally figure a solution out.





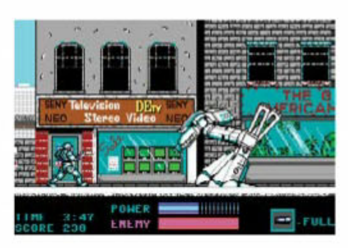
ROBOCOP 1988

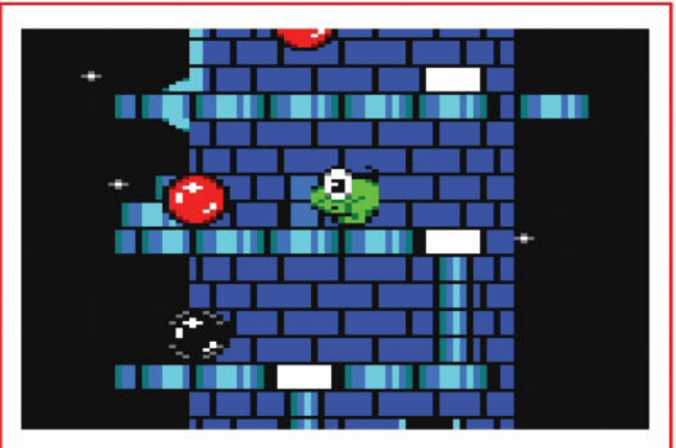
OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ Ocean was no stranger to film and TV licences, but many of its earlier efforts were abysmal. *Robocop* was not only one of its most successful licences ever, but also set the template for what would follow, with levels based around key sequences from the film.

Coded by Mike Lamb, *Robocop* was first and foremost run-and-gun, with the vast majority of its levels featuring numerous bad guys for *Robocop* to gun down. Every now and then, however, the stages would be punctuated by smaller interludes that ranged from saving a woman captured at knife point, to putting together an identikit of a bad guy. It worked brilliantly, so well in fact that Ocean's game stayed at the top of the charts for months. Ocean would take several more stabs at the franchise in later years, but its original effort remains the best.







NEBULUS 1988

TRIFFIX ENTERTAINMENT INC

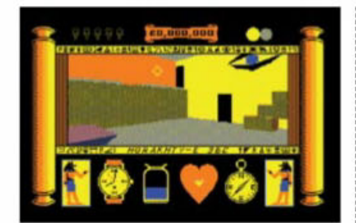
■ Clever programming made the towers in *Nebulus* continually rotate as main character Pogo climbed up them. *Nebulus* was far more than a snazzy tech demo however, and the clever design of the towers soon proved that creator John Phillips had put a lot of thought into their actual construction. An obscure sequel was released solely for the Amiga in 1991.

OPERATION WOLF 1988

OCEAN SOFTWARE

■ More arcade magic from Ocean. This was a highly competent port of the Taito coin-op, which featured huge sprites, decent scrolling and plenty of fast-paced action. Like its arcade parent, this Amstrad port isn't the most complex of games and it's crying out for some two-player action, but the gunplay never lets up for a second, ensuring every game is fast and exciting.





TOTAL ECLIPSE 1988

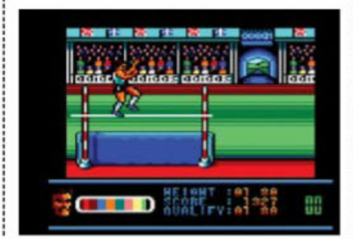
INCENTIVE SOFTWARE

This ridiculously ambitious effort was the third game to utilise the 3D engine Freescape and was set in Egypt in the Thirties. It's a very clever adventure game that utilises mechanics such as dehydration and a heart monitor to ensure you're fit enough to navigate the many traps found in the massive pyramid you're exploring. It runs at a painfully slow rate, but the cleverly designed puzzles and the clever ideas (a flashlight lets you explore darker regions of the pyramid) ensure you keep playing.

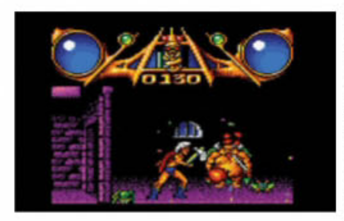
DALEY THOMPSON'S OLYMPIC CHALLENGE 1988

OCEAN SOFTWARE

The final *Daley Thompson* game remains our favourite. The graphics are superb, with lovely animation and large, vibrant sprites, while the events themselves are nice and varied – ranging from the discus and pole vault to the 100-metre hurdles. Special mention goes to the series of training events that determined your overall fitness level for each new day and the ability to choose different trainers to wear in the field.







SAVAGE 1988

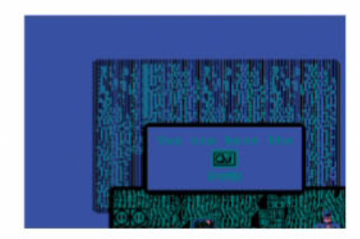
PROBE SOFTWARE

Coded by David Perry, *Savage* was essentially three games in one, each of which seriously pushes the CPC to its absolute limits. Section one was a run-and-gun featuring a gigantic main sprite and lots of crazy particle explosions. The second level switched pace and perspective, turning into a *Space Harrier*-styled shooter, while the last was an exploration-based shooter where you must fly an eagle around a huge labyrinth in search of escape. It's certainly hard, but it plays well and still looks brilliant today.

BATMAN THE CAPED CRUSADER 1988

OCEAN SOFTWARE

Coded by Jim Bagley, *The Caped Crusader* is great value for money as Batman has two distinct cases to solve. Not only do the graphics look nice and cartoon-like, even the screens ape the comics, with each area opening up in a separate comic panel. Fuelled by an excellent and very comprehensive icon system, *Batman The Caped Crusader* is a thoroughly gripping adventure that needs to be experienced.

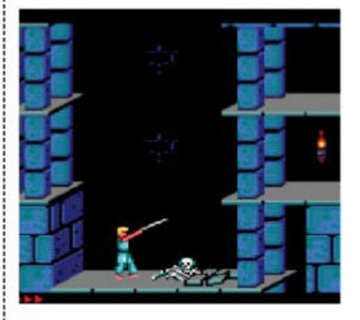


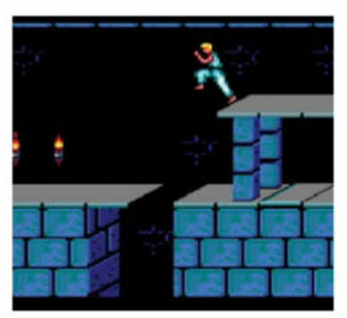


PRINCE OF PERSIA 1990

BRØDERBUND

The incredible success of Jordan Mechner's Apple II game meant it was ported to a huge number of systems. The Amstrad was no exception, and we're delighted to say that it received a truly stunning port that no doubt had Spectrum and C64 owners incredibly jealous. It's essentially exactly the same game as the Apple II original, meaning the Prince has just 60 minutes to navigate a huge dungeon and rescue his beloved Princess. It's massively improved over Mechner's original, thanks to some beautifully detailed sprites, tight controls and great use of colour throughout.





LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE 1990

GREMLIN GRAPHICS

The CPC didn't have many good original racing games, but it did have this fine port of the hit Amiga game. Once you get past the weak visuals, you'll discover that *Lotus Esprit* is an excellent racer with a large number of different courses, lots of individual settings to tweak and an excellent two-player mode. Sadly, the CPC didn't receive either of the two sequels.





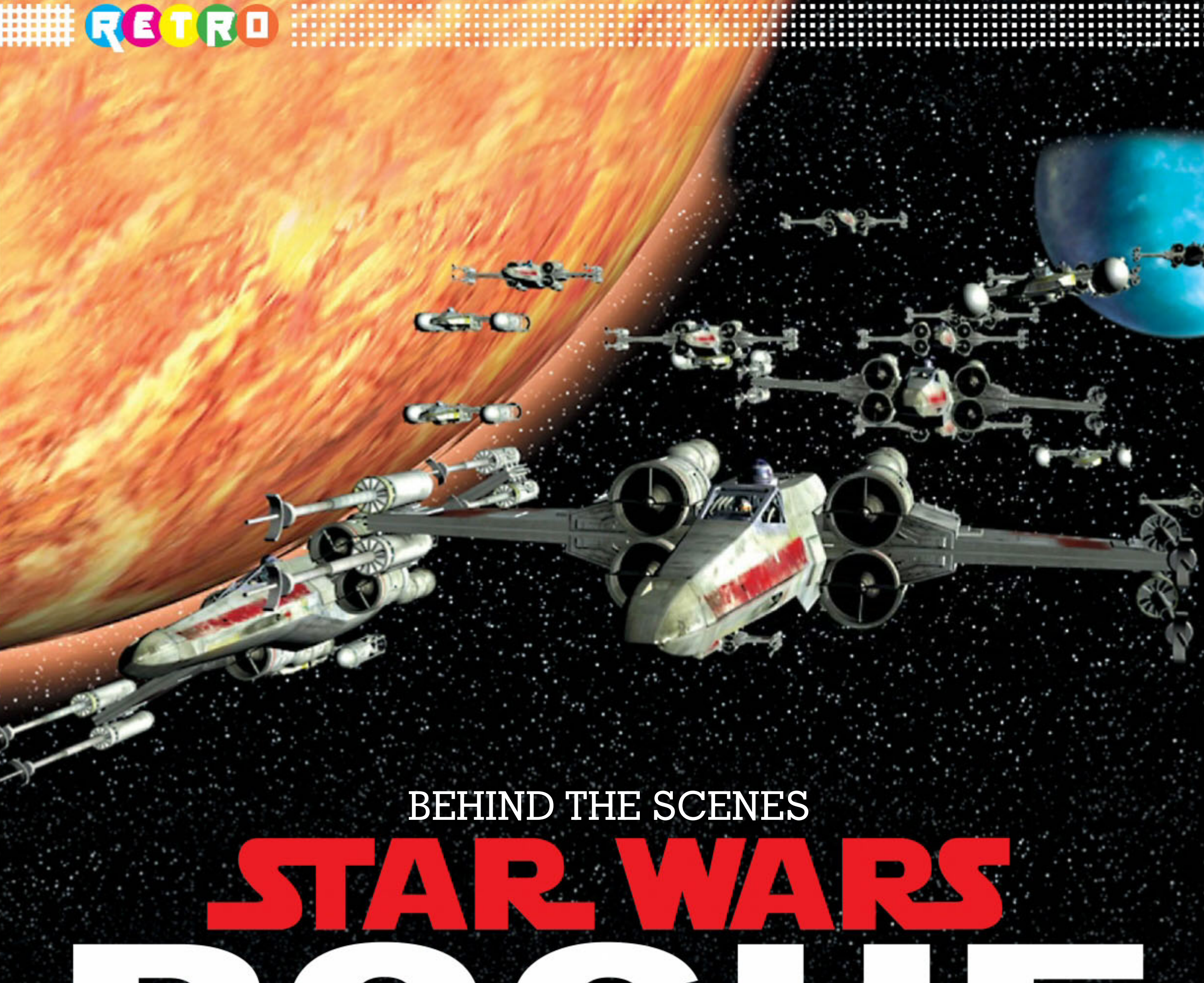
NORTH & SOUTH 1991

INFOGRAMES

Based on the popular Belgian comic *Les Tuniques Bleues*, *North & South* is a wonderful strategy game where you try to capture as much enemy territory as possible. There are a large number of different battalions to master, from cannons to horsemen while the graphics are exceptional, easy matching the impressive 16-bit ports.

AND THE REST…

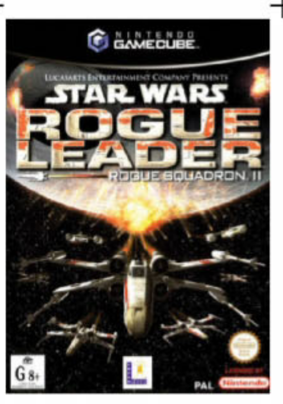
- TEMPEST (1986) ELECTRIC DREAMS
- ZOMBI (1986) UBISOFT
- TAU CETI (1986) CRL
- WEREWOLVES OF LONDON (1987) VIZ DESIGN
- MASK (1987) GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- NIGEL MANSELL'S GRAND PRIX (1988) DJL SOFTWARE
- CHASE H.Q. (1989) OCEAN SOFTWARE
- FANTASY WORLD DIZZY (1989) THE OLIVER TWINS
- LASER SQUAD (1989) JULIAN GOLLOP
- DAN DARE III: THE ESCAPE (1990) PROBE SOFTWARE
- FIENDISH FREDDY'S BIG TOP 'O FUN (1990) MINDSCAPE
- BABY JO (1992) LORICIEL



BEHIND THE SCENES

STAR WARS ROGUE LEADER
ROGUE SQUADRON II

With the launch of the GameCube came one of the most exciting Star Wars games ever made, a visual powerhouse which dropped jaws and fulfilled many a fantasy



Released: 2001
Format: GameCube
Publisher: LucasArts
Key Staff: Julian Eggebrecht (Director), Holger Schmidt (Lead Software Engineer), Thomas Engel (Technical Lead Engineer), Paul Topolos (Lead Artist), Jim Moore (Texture Artist), Bastian Hoppe (Modeller), Tony Wong (Software Engineer)

WHEN IT COMES TO BIG-NAME LICENSES IN GAMING, THERE ARE FEW THAT CAN BOAST THE SAME LONGEVITY OR VARIATION OF INTERPRETATIONS, AS STAR WARS. Whether it's early classics like Atari's arcade machine in 1983, or later titles like *Knights of the Old Republic* and the *Lego Star Wars* series, millions of players the world over have been able to explore the fabled galaxy far, far away in a myriad of ways. And from the beginning, numerous titles have involved jumping into the cockpit and taking the Empire head on. In this regard, few games come close to the magic of *Star Wars Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader*, first released alongside the U.S. launch of the Nintendo GameCube in November 2001. A game that took an arcade-inspired approach to flight combat and allowed players to relive famous moments from the original trilogy.

After the success of the first *Rogue Squadron* game for N64 and PC and the spin off *Episode 1: Battle for Naboo*, developer Factor 5 was set on making the next title in the series. *Rogue Leader's* director Julian Eggebrecht explains how the studio's close relationship with Nintendo allowed it to start work on a game for Nintendo's new console. "During the later years of the N64, Nintendo pulled us into the technology partner team that designed the GameCube platform because of our audio expertise," he says. "Since we were co-designing the hardware and knew every nook and cranny of the chipset, it also made sense to create the next-generation *Rogue Squadron* sequel for that platform because we would be the first ones to ever have access to working prototypes."

To show off what they could do with the new hardware, Factor 5 created a prototype to be displayed at Nintendo's now-defunct tradeshow, Space World, in August 2000. The team built the prototype in an insanely quick nineteen days, wowing those in attendance with a showcase of combat on the surface of the Death Star – with visuals and sound that had yet to be achieved in any *Star Wars* game. Things were looking positive, but Eggebrecht reveals that in the wake of Space World there were some backstage politics taking place. "Microsoft tried to snatch the game away from Nintendo for the original Xbox as a launch title," he tells us. "LucasArts wanted to go with Microsoft, but we refused to switch platforms, first of all because of our close alliance with Nintendo, but also because the Xbox would not have been able to run the game at sixty frames per second. I absolutely wanted *Rogue Leader* to become the ultimate *Star Wars* game – and that needed to have sixty frames per second." Despite the enticing nature of switching to Microsoft, LucasArts agreed to honour Factor 5's decision. But it wasn't the only aspect of behind-the-scenes politics that the team had to deal with after showing off their impressive prototype, as Eggbrecht reveals. "The internal development group working on *Starfighter* for the PlayStation 2 was shocked by our Space World demo and tried to convince management to stop a *Rogue Squadron* sequel so that it would not overshadow *Starfighter* and the prequel universe." Thankfully the rogue development studio didn't get its way and LucasArts allowed Factor 5 to establish its own vision for the sequel on the console of its choice, "At the end of the day *Rogue Squadron* for the N64 had been a multi-million selling success, so LucasArts gave us carte blanche to do whatever we wanted with a sequel, and that included the choice of platform," explains Eggebrecht.

MICROSOFT TRIED TO SNATCH THE GAME AWAY FROM NINTENDO FOR THE ORIGINAL XBOX AS A LAUNCH TITLE
JULIAN EGGEBRECHT

Although the team traversed these early obstacles, they needed to finish the game in time for GameCube's launch. As a result, the development time was a little too close for comfort. "It was nine months and 19 days," Eggebrecht recalls, with pinpoint accuracy. "19 days in August 2000 from when we got the first working prototype



■ Raid on Bespin is an original mission that allows you to explore Lando Calrissian's Cloud City in all its glory.


■ The Battle of Endor is easily the most chaotic mission, containing manic space scraps with TIE fighters and Star Destroyers.

FROZEN IN CARBONITE

Julian Eggebrecht talks about the unreleased Rogue Squadron Trilogy game

ROGUE LEADER WAS meant to be re-released as part of a trilogy game intended for the Nintendo Wii, but it never saw a release. "We self-financed *Rogue Leaders: Rogue Squadron* Wii and unfortunately the studio ran into financial trouble in 2008 when the game was almost done," explains Eggebrecht. "LucasArts was at the beginning of its long end and could not step in financially to save the day, so the studio shut down with a lot of debt and the inevitable lawsuits following such events."

The game would've seen tweaked versions of the *Rogue Squadron* trilogy and included Mii integration alongside motion control lightsaber battles. Eggebrecht fills us in on the game's current state. "While we were able to finish the game, thanks to an amazingly motivated and loyal core team, LucasArts was unable to muster the courage to step into the courts and simply publish the title, so it remains buried in its vaults, just like the ark at the end of the first *Indiana Jones* movie. Nowadays Disney owns the property and the game would be a perfect fit for many platforms, but it would take almost a miracle to bring it back to life. The fact that the game never came out broke a lot of hearts for the development team. Everyone agrees it is the best *Rogue Squadron* ever made, and with that one of the best *Star Wars* games, but at the end of the day fate was not on our side."

Earlier this year, old titles including *Super Star Wars* were made available for digital download on PS4. And with a higher number of re-releases and remasters around than the womp rat population, it's not unreasonable to hope that *Rogue Leaders* will one day take to the skies in some form.





Ever since *Star Wars Rogue Leader* arrived in the office everyone – and we do mean everyone – has gawped at the screen in utter disbelief, before tentatively asking us for 'a quick blast'

NGC Magazine, Issue 63. 2001

of the chipset from ATI (back then ArtX) until the unveiling and demo in Tokyo. And then nine months from late December of that year to early September 2001." But it wasn't just the looming time scale that made development a tight squeeze, as Eggebrecht continues. "Why the actual development ramp-up happened so late was mostly due to everyone on the team being busy finishing other things – *Star Wars: Battle For Naboo* and *Indiana Jones & the Infernal Machine* for the N64, as well as the audio Studio Development Kit and development tools for the GameCube called MusyX."

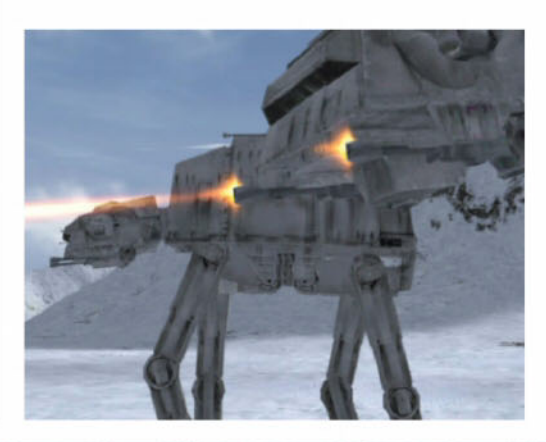
Even though the timescale was difficult, it seems that the ability to pursue the team's vision was a huge driving factor. And as Eggebrecht explains, *Rogue Leader* was more in-line with what the team wanted to do originally. "My original design for *Rogue Squadron* was a combination of what would be *Rogue Leader* and *Rebel Strike*. It essentially was a best-of *Star Wars*, based on the movie and allowing for fantasy fulfilment, but also filling in the story gaps that one wondered about when watching the original trilogy."

A large part of realising this vision was the GameCube's hardware set-up, which was leaps and bounds ahead of the cartridge-based Nintendo 64. "It

> **OUR INSPIRATION CAME FROM THE IMMENSELY PLAYABLE STAR WARS ARCADE VECTOR GAME THAT ATARI CREATED IN 1983**
> HOLGER SCHMIDT

was vastly different since Nintendo and ArtX avoided the biggest pitfalls of the N64," explains Eggebrecht, "Thomas Engel [Technical Lead Engineer] and I had been on the hardware development team for the GameCube and we made sure to re-emphasise the most important points that we as developers took from the N64 as major drawbacks. The result was a hardware that to this day is probably the most efficient console chipset ever designed."

Technical Lead Engineer, Thomas Engel, backs up Eggebrecht while highlighting the difficulties with the previous hardware of the Nintendo 64. "Silicon Graphics had made bad mistakes in the N64's performance of









the GPU and overall memory bandwidth," he explains. "During GameCube design sessions the team told the story of just how shocked they were about the bad memory performance as the first N64 prototypes came off the assembly line. The GameCube was the counter-thesis to that. It was all about memory bandwidth and extremely fast GPU draw performance, and these two are really key to a great console and game machine. Sixty frames-per-second games were almost impossible to make on the N64, but on the GameCube we pulled that feat off despite the great graphics with relative ease."

With Nintendo's purple powerhouse at its disposal, Factor 5 flew straight into the chaotic trench of development. But despite the new hardware set-up, some of its old approaches and methods for creating *Rogue Squadron* and *Battle for Naboo* were carried over. "The key tools remained the same including the level editor toolset as well as our preferred 3D toolsets," explains Eggebrecht, who goes on to detail the new tools needed, and how the GameCube's hardware allowed for *Rogue Leader*'s crisp visuals. "What changed, and was elaborated on, was everything that had to do with shaders. We suddenly were able to create surfaces that looked like the original movie models, and of course the lighting engine was vastly, vastly superior and with that needed a complete new set of tools. I don't know what made us think that it could be done, but there was an intense push to get all the shading techniques that we only had read about for movies and admired at Pixar for years."

This meant the team could re-create famous scenes and locations from the original trilogy in outstanding detail. Whether it was the Death Star's manic rush down the trench, the orange skies of Bespin's Cloud City, or the vast deserts of Tattooine, *Rogue Leader* allowed players to fly in those worlds in ways that had not been achieved in the medium previously. But to create these locations with such authenticity meant that changes had to be made from the N64 era, as Eggebrecht explains. "The most radical changes to the prior games were completely new engines for cityscapes for Bespin, a forest and vegetation engine for Endor, and a Death Star surface engine that was also used for the surface of the Super Star Destroyer in *Rebel Strike*. Last but not least, there also was a complete indoor engine that we built for the ship selection hangars in *Rogue Leader* and expanded upon with gameplay in *Rebel Strike*."

Texture Artist Jim Moore fills us in on the methods the team used to make these locations come to life. "A lot of the time it simply came down to painstakingly matching


The Death Star trench run in the game's opening level is lovingly recreated down to the finest detail.


During the Battle of Hoth, the game allows you to take down AT-ATs manually. You'll need nimble fingers!

what we could find in production stills or archival shots provided by LucasFilm," he says. "Fortunately, due to the ongoing popularity of the franchise, there was a wealth of material to draw from that still exists today, which is probably not true of most 30-40 year old franchises." And although the license didn't allow for a departure in visual style, the idea of re-creation helped the game define its visual identity. "The main goal for the art department was to create as faithful a translation as possible," Moore states. "In a way, that in itself became the artistic stamp. At one point I was even reproducing the outlets that are visible from the soundstage, which they were filming on!" The largest reason that Moore and the other artists could achieve this was due to the close ties and spacial proximity to LucasArts. "At the time, we were located across the street from them and down the road from Skywalker Ranch," he explains. "This meant we had access to a lot of materials from the license. Heading up this process was LucasFilm veteran Paul Topolos [Lead Artist] who oversaw this effort.

Although Factor 5 had the power and capability to make everything look and sound amazing, a *Star Wars* flight game would be nothing without a fluid control scheme. *Rogue Leader* excelled in this capacity, creating a system that could be easily picked up but allowed those strong with the force to pull off impressive manoeuvres. Lead Software Engineer, Holger Schmidt, details the process in tweaking controls to the finest degree possible. "Part of that was simply a lot of research time and endless iteration," he casually explains, "when *Rogue Leader* came around, we had been writing code for flight controls and physics for four years and knew so many subtle tricks that no other flight game had done or would ever do. The emphasis was on accessibility for the casual player, right from the very first *Rogue Squadron* onwards." And whilst Factor 5 was not the first to create *Star Wars* flight games, the team had a clear vision of pick-up-and-play arcade enjoyment when it came to gameplay approach.

"We wanted to be the opposite of the X-Wing games for the PC. They tried the simulation path, our inspiration came from the immensely playable *Star Wars* arcade vector game that Atari created in 1983," Schmidt explains. "In pure technical terms, the game profited tremendously from the sixty frames per second. That, and the fact that we were likely the first to use a technique called triple buffering, made the already decent controls for *Rogue Squadron* so much better."

It's clear that this dedication and effort spread throughout the entire team, meaning they could make fast progress on the title, even when left to go it alone. "We finished the design of the game in early January." Schmidt explains. "At the time there was still the thought of co-development with mission designers at LucasArts, but after they started falling behind on their levels, we took the huge risk of burdening our four mission designers

FULLY OPERATIONAL DEVELOPER

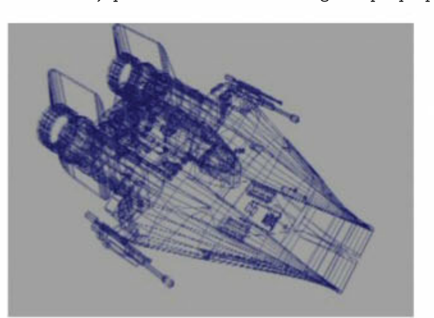
Among Rogue Leader's secrets and unlockables was an intriguing "making of" documentary

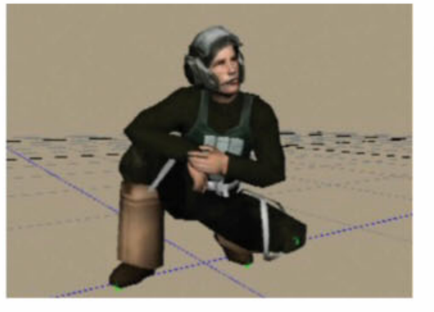
STAR WARS: ROGUE Leader contained a host of collectibles (including flying cars and missions played from the perspective of the Empire), but among these was a short unlockable documentary about the making of the game. It features an interview with Julian Eggebrecht and shows many members of the development team. In it you can see Factor 5's office and have a look into the past as the team worked on the game. In 2001, this was quite rare to see, especially in the age before Internet video streaming. To unlock the documentary in-game you simply need to complete all ten normal missions of the game, or enter a cheat code.





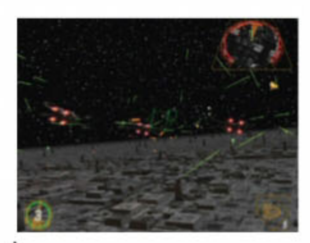
THE ONLY TIME WE LET GO OF THE GAS PEDAL WAS MY WEDDING IN MAY 2001, WHICH THE WHOLE TEAM USED FOR A WELCOME BREAK
HOLGER SCHMIDT





> A GAMING EVOLUTION

Rogue Squadron > Rogue Squadron II > Rogue Squadron III



Rogue Squadron formed the ground work for the series. It's the only *Rogue Squadron* title to be re-released on digital platforms like Steam and GOG.



Rebel Strike unfortunately introduced rubbish on-foot sections, but it improved the smoothness of flight controls and included a co-op version of the *Rogue Leader* campaign.



at Factor 5 with all levels in the game." So, in order to make sure that the plan could be thoroughly executed, new individuals were brought in, including those who'd worked on Nintendo hardware. "One of our new team members [Tony Wong] came on board from Rare, where he had been Lead Engineer on *Conker's Bad Fur Day* and then the GameCube version of *Perfect Dark* that fell apart afterwards." Schmidt continues. "He arrived in January and rounded out an unbelievable engineering, art, and design team at Factor 5 that crunched all throughout the year to make the launch date. The only time we let go of the gas pedal was my wedding in May 2001, which the whole team used for a welcome break."

Like the plucky group of rogues that took on the *Empire's finest* in the 1977 film blockbuster, Factor 5 blasted ahead to the finish, managing to make one of the finest *Star Wars* games to date, all in nine months. And despite early backstage politics, Eggebrecht praises LucasArts and its ability to let the team follow their vision. "While LucasArts had very little involvement in *Rogue Leader*, to their credit that is what we needed and wanted to pull the game off with the quality it had within a very tight timeframe. You can only do that without outside interference and in a tightly bonded group." Eggebrecht continues by summarising furthers reasons behind LucasArts and LucasFilm Licensing's laissez-faire attitude. "I think everyone at LucasFilm recognised that we deeply connected with *Star Wars* and just instinctively understood the franchise, and that we were truly fanatical about re-creating the universe perfectly. They respected that, as opposed to all other *Star Wars* games that didn't even get any of the basics right."

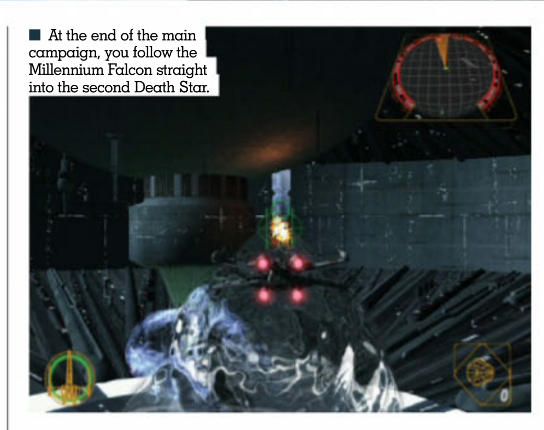
Of course, this allowed the team to have a little fun outside creating a faithful replication of the *Star Wars* film universe. "We had complete autonomy, control, and everything was allowed." Eggbrecht emphasises. "The best indication of that is the Busby-Berkley inspired dancing stormtroopers logo sequence. I never thought that we would get that by Lucasfilm Licensing, but they allowed it. It was much more witty and bizarre than our previous logo sequences. In *Rogue Squadron* the X-Wing shoots at the private parts of the LucasArts gold guy, something more of an insider joke for us, while in *Rebel Strike* we did get the rights to use the *Star Wars* disco theme to go into all-out camp territory, something they unfortunately later made into a whole product with *Star Wars* Kinect. *Rogue Leader* was the clever in-between."



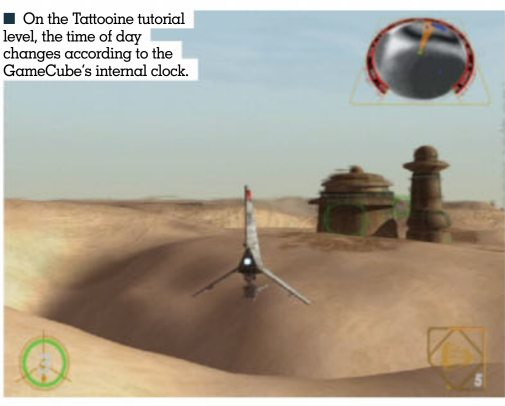


Some people may forgo sleep with this one. Exciting missions, unbelievable visuals and sound, and, like the first *Rogue* and *Naboo*, a replay factor through the roof. If we had higher than a 5.0, this one would get it

GamePro, Issue 159, 2001



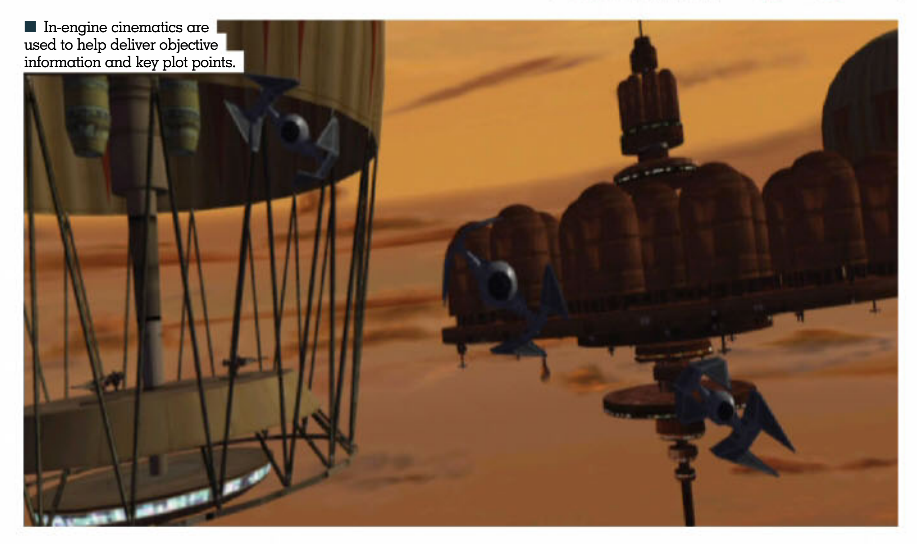
At the end of the main campaign, you follow the Millennium Falcon straight into the second Death Star.



On the Tattooine tutorial level, the time of day changes according to the GameCube's internal clock.

On the flipside of this was Nintendo, who had a more hands-on approach when it came to testing and feedback. "Nintendo was the opposite, with Ken Lobb – who right afterward went to Microsoft – being very involved and his Treehouse group giving us a lot of valuable feedback for every level," Eggebrecht says. It's also clear from his testimony that the Big N were supportive of the end result. "Nintendo loved the title because it played well and was a hardware showcase, something its own teams are not as strong in pulling off as well as the perfect playability factor they are known for. The GameCube was a problematic launch for Nintendo because Nintendo Japan chose to have Luigi's Mansion as its main title, a game that while innovative and quirky, certainly was not what was needed for mainstream success. It was experimental, while *Rogue Leader* provided the big, bold, showcase."

On release *Rogue Leader* did brilliantly with critics and proved to be a huge seller for the GameCube, becoming the system's best-selling third-party game at launch in the US and entering the UK gaming charts at number one when it released in May 2002. Its arcade-styled design philosophy and approach to fantasy fulfilment still make it one of the most fun and accurate renditions of the original film trilogy. To this day it is still a must-have for any *Star Wars* fan or fan of flight combat games. Unfortunately, the title remains unreleased on newer platforms (although some pray Disney will alter the deal further in future), but it's still more than worth tracking down an old copy and strapping yourself in for one of the GameCube's most incredible experiences (remember the Wii is backwards compatible too). If you do, it'll be just like Beggar's Canyon back home.



In-engine cinematics are used to help deliver objective information and key plot points.



FORUM FRIENDS

"To me, I always think it's a little funny because, generally speaking, the stereotype for developers and their communities is one of animosity, a lot of people are very anxious about what people are going to say about the game. But my experiences with the *Civ* community were just so positive. I felt like they were very important for me growing as a designer, so I always feel like I owe a big debt to the community, and I'm glad they remembered me."



INTERVIEW
SOREN JOHNSON

Beyond Sid Meier, there are few names as significant as Soren Johnson when it comes to the Civilization franchise. We speak to the man that arguably made the game what it is today

SELECT GAMEOGRAPHY



Civilization III (2001)
Programmer/ Designer



Civiilzation IV (2005)
Lead designer



Offworld Trading Company (2016)
Lead designer/ programmer

IT WAS A MIXTURE of circumstance and luck that put Soren Johnson in charge of the *Civilization* franchise at Firaxis, but here was a man who was perfectly suited for the role. In an age where game designers didn't really exist as an exact role, Johnson was given the reins of the most important 4X strategy game around. Having worked heavily on *Civ III* and ultimately put in charge of the design of *Civ IV*, Johnson went on to add in gameplay mechanics that have become staples of not only the franchise itself, but even the 4X genre as a whole…

What got you into game development in the first place?
Well, I grew up playing videogames so it was always something I was into when I was a kid. I mean this would have been in the Eighties. I wouldn't say that I thought of it as a career or anything, it was just something that I loved. And then I went to college and I started to study computer science, I got into programming, and every project that I had to do for my CS programme, if I had any sort of leeway, I would turn it into a game if I could. It kind of became clear to me that that was what I was interested in. I had a friend who did an internship for Electronic Arts so he was able to help me get one and once I did that I thought, "Well, this seems like it would be a good career." I really lucked out with *Civ III* because that was literally my first job out of college. I was also a history major in college, so that was the other thing I was really passionate about, you know, I loved Sid Meier's games, and I loved *Civ I*. And so when I was just about to graduate – well, it's a long story – but basically the *Civ III* team had just fallen about and they had just lost all their programmers and so they needed to hire a bunch, and so that's how I was able to get an interview and get into the team and so quickly and at such a young age.

WHEN SID MEIER IS WORKING ON PROTOTYPES, HE IS PRETTY MUCH A LONE WOLF AT THAT POINT, THAT'S PRETTY MUCH HOW HE WORKS

What was it about programming that interested you?
I think if I knew there was a way to become a videogame designer I probably would have done that, but back then the idea of just becoming a pure designer was even more out there. To me I learned to program because that was the way I could make a game, there was no real way to design a game and have someone else make it for me, and so I had to figure out how to program by myself. I had learned how to program to learn how to make these games by myself, but I wouldn't say that I love programming just for its own sake. To me it's just a tool, a means to an end.

You mentioned that the entire team had left the project, did that affect the game's initial development?

It was a pretty big deal and perhaps most importantly they took basically the entire programming staff with them, which was not a huge staff but the core programmers. The programmers who did not go to Big Huge Games were the audio programmer and an intern, and that was basically all that was left. The intern basically became the lead programmer because there was no one else there. They had to hire a whole bunch of people, so I sent in my resume, they hired me. Do you know who Jake Solomon (lead designer of *Xcom: Enemy Unknown*) is?

Sure, yeah.

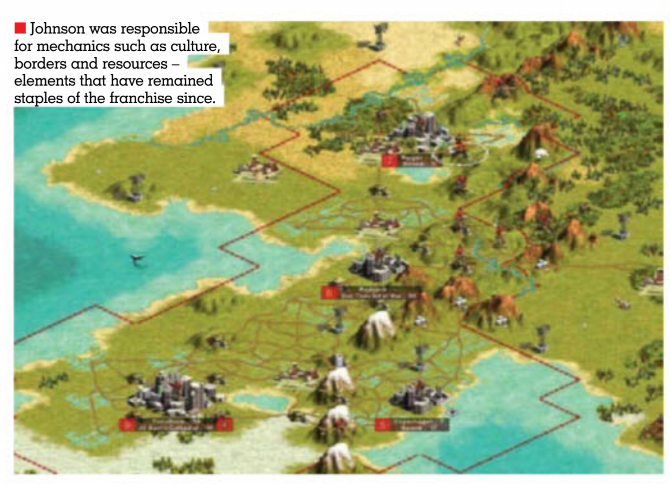
We got hired the same week. We met during the same week, in the elevator on the way up because he was also hired to be one of the people to get *Civ III* done. That was how that project started, or… restarted, I guess.

While you designed a lot of *Civ III*, you also programmed a large portion of it too – in particular how the AI functions. What was your goal with this and how it was implemented in the game?

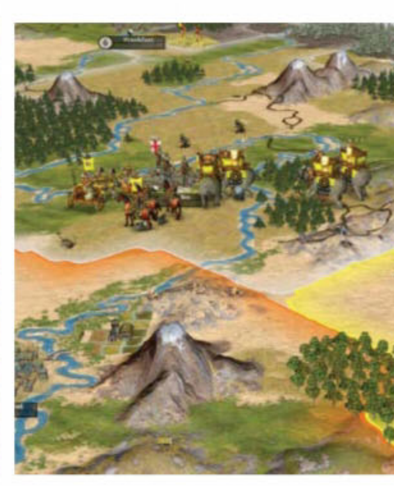
Yeah, I wrote the AI for *Civ III* and for *Civ IV*. To me the AI is a core part of a 4X strategy game where the behaviour of the AI is going to affect the player's experience so directly. I feel like the AI is just a core part of the game design. You could easily design a good *Civ* game but then if the AI isn't done very well, then it could basically ruin the experience. So I wanted to control that part of the experience as well. We made big decisions about, for example, how much the AI should declare war, or how much should the AI trade with you, or how much should the AI trade with each other? Those are definitely things that I tried a lot of different things for.

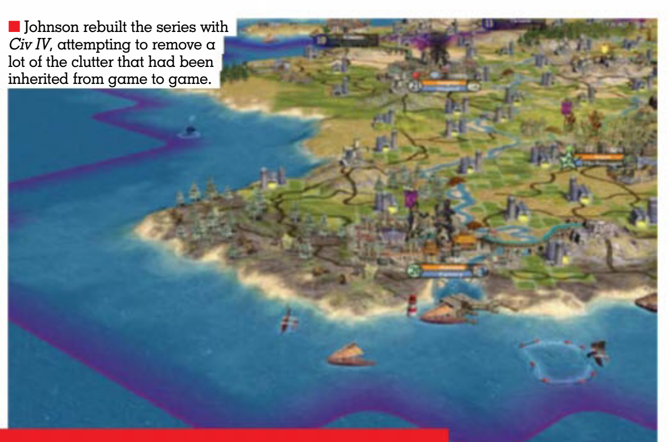
It's hard to talk about *Civilization* without talking about Sid Meier. Did you get to work with him in any fashion?

When he is working on prototypes he is pretty much a lone wolf at that point, that's pretty much how he works. But while I was there and after I left as well there had been a number of projects where once he did take the next step to take the prototype to development or in the case of *Pirates* take over a project. It was cool to see him get more directly involved with the team, and in *Pirates* or in *Civilization Revolution*, those were both games where he was writing all of the core game code and there were teams built around him to help support him with the stuff he needed to turn into full-fledged projects.



Johnson was responsible for mechanics such as culture, borders and resources – elements that have remained staples of the franchise since.





Johnson rebuilt the series with *Civ IV*, attempting to remove a lot of the clutter that had been inherited from game to game.



THERE'S A RULE OF THUMB FOR EACH NEW CIVILIZATION VERSION; IT SHOULD BE ONE-THIRD OLD, ONE-THIRD IMPROVED AND ONE-THIRD NEW

It was a pretty big inspiration to see him, you know he's done this for so long and he's still able to make games at that level. That was pretty cool.

So how did you come to be the main designer on *Civ IV*?

They had to rebuild the team for *Civ III* so there really wasn't a lot of old guard. The simple answer is that there really wasn't anyone else. I don't know how else to put it. I was basically the obvious choice after *Civ III* shipped. *Civ III* was basically co-designed between me and Jeff Briggs and he didn't really want to design another *Civ* game, and beyond that I was growing into a role and they wanted me to step up and do more. And I definitely showed that I was capable of doing a good job designing a *Civ* game so it was sort of just a natural thing. There really wasn't anyone else at the company at that time who wanted to design a *Civ* game. I mean, that sounds strange, but it wasn't a huge company at that point, probably – before *Civ IV* started – you're probably only talking about a 30 or 40 person company and probably half of those people are artists.

Given this opportunity, what was it that you wanted to bring to *Civ* as a franchise?

It was pretty exciting to be able to start part of a project from the very beginning. We had a number of real high-level goals, some of which are not really pure game design – like I really wanted a *Civ* where the multiplayer was actually fun and was actually a part of the project from the beginning, and for the first six months, *Civ IV* was actually just a multiplayer game, not a single-player game at all. We built the initial prototype just as a multiplayer thing because when that is true you can start testing immediately, you don't have to wait for the AI to play. So that was something that was really important to us. We wanted to make a game that was very, very friendly for modders. So we made a lot of steps to make that happen, putting all the data in a standard format like XML and eventually getting to a point where all the game and AI code was in a sort of DLL file so that the user code and change it and recompile it. So that stuff was really important.





■ With *Civ IV*, the series moved to 3D for the first time, which presented a large number of challenges that the team hadn't handled before.

It's interesting with *Civilization* how the core game has always remained the same, yet sequels still come and there are still changes and improvements to the formula. What's the process in how these new ideas are conceived during development?

There is a rule of thumb that has probably been brought up quite a bit for each of the *Civilization* versions, which is a Civ game should be one-third old, one-third improved and one third new. There should be a part of the game that has unchanged from before, there should be a bunch of the game that kind of works the same but is improved and there should be a bunch of stuff that's brand new. So it shouldn't feel like it's a totally different game, but at the same time it clearly feels like it's an improvement over its predecessor.

With more recent iterations of *Civ* there's been a stronger focus on accessibility, which is often seen – however wrong – as 'dumbed down' by the fanbase. Is it difficult to find a balance between making each new game more accessible while simultaneously maintaining that depth?

I think that *Civ V* suffered for that a little bit because it kind of got compared to *Civ IV* plus the expansions, which, at the time if you had *Beyond The Sword*, there was a lot of stuff there. I'm kind of curious about how *Civ VI* does because they've stated that they're keeping all of the stuff from *Civ V* with the last expansion plus they're adding more stuff – so that's how they're going to head off having that problem, but at the same time I also tend to feel like for each generation you need to cut away some of the old stuff to leave room for the new stuff. You can't just cram more and more stuff in from a game design standpoint. So I'm kind of curious to see how that's gonna work out, and it could be that it's just marketing speak to make people excited about the game that it includes everything from *Civ V* – I guess we'll see. But it's not an easy line to walk to decide what stuff to take and what to keep, but for sure this was something we talked about internally with *Civ IV*. We were like, "Well, we're not just going to take everything from *Civ III* and add a bunch of stuff to it."

What made you decide to leave Firaxis in the end?

Well, I had worked on enough *Civ* games. I could have been involved in *Civ V* if I wanted to, but I really had poured a lot of myself into not just *Civ IV* but *Civ III* – more or less ten years of my life dedicated to these types of games. And I felt like that if I had stayed I'd just have been collecting a pay cheque basically, because I wouldn't be much use to the team. I got to the point where when someone would raise an idea about *Civ* I would quickly tell them "Well, these are the five reasons that is a bad idea," because I knew all of the problems and all of the challenges for making a *Civ* game work. But at some point designers need to be able to follow bad ideas or things that theoretically aren't supposed to work. That's okay, that's part of the process, too, you know? I think I got to the point with *Civ* where it was hard for me to take that leap anymore because I was just so aware of all the issues with all the different new ideas for the game. So it was important that the game moved on to a different designer at that point.

RISE TO POWER

"■■■ I remember *Master Of Orion III* was being made at the same time that *Civ III* was being made. And it actually got much better press coverage than we did before release, and that's pretty much forgotten now because *Master Of Orion III* was basically a massive disaster and killed the franchise. But that could've been us, potentially, right? Whereas now I think *Civ* is big enough that even if there was a version that somehow went very, very poorly, I think the franchise would still survive."



Rare studied real gorillas at the office-adjacent zoo to get Donkey Kong's mannerisms down and realistic, though they eventually modelled his movement on that of a galloping horse.

GAME CHANGERS

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

Released: 21 November 1994 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Rare **System:** SNES

One of the best selling SNES games of all time and a pivotal moment in the history of Rare, Donkey Kong Country is a milestone moment for Nintendo.

DONKEY KONG ARRIVED on the scene just as Nintendo needed him to; Mario's greatest adversary does, after all, have a habit of kidnapping the attention of the masses as successfully as he does damsels in distress. The SNES was rapidly approaching the danger zone, the 16-bit success story was about to be surpassed technologically by the dawn of the 32-bit era and Nintendo was at something of a loss. The Sega Saturn and PlayStation were on the horizon, the N64 was years from release, threatening to leave Nintendo looking behind the times – that, as far as common state of affairs go, was difficult to swallow back in the Nineties, even if it seems to frequently be the case these days.

Thankfully, for everybody involved, fate intervened. Senior Nintendo staff dispatched from Kyoto found themselves in rainy Twycross, at the door of Rare's farmhouse HQ. Inside it, they discovered the saviour of the SNES. Rare's Tim and Chris Stamper had taken a gamble and invested heavily in Silicon Graphics workstations, estimated to be worth around £80,000 each, and were at work on a boxing title built using cutting-edge SGI technology. That project never moved past the prototype stage, but it did enough to impress Nintendo, enough, in fact, to hand the Stampers the keys to the kingdom.

Nintendo purchased a 49 per cent stake in Rare, making it a second-party developer, and allowed it the creative license to give Donkey Kong his first fully-fledged adventure. The rest, as they say, is history. But to understand the importance of *Donkey Kong Country* back in 1994, after a protracted 18-month development cycle by fewer than 20 developers, you really need to look into the mastery behind those polygons.

Donkey Kong Country was one of the first games to use pre-rendered 3D graphics – DMA Design had come

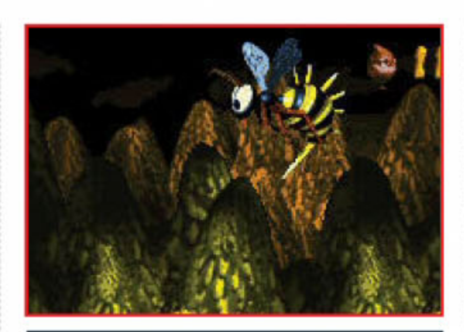
BEST BOSS

THE BEST VILLAINS IN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



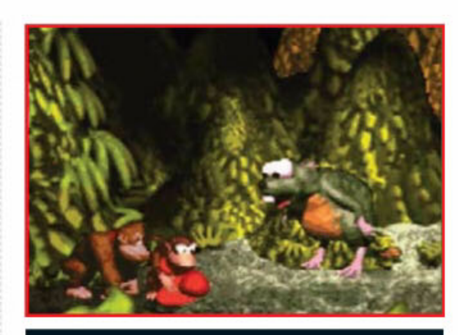
KING K ROOL

★ The thief behind the missing banana hoard, King K Rool arrived on the scene and propelled Donkey and Diddy Kong into a wild adventure. The final battle, fought on the Gangplank Galleon, is still one of the best battles of the SNES era.



QUEEN B

★ The third boss in the game, located in Bumble B Rumble, Queen B was essentially a larger version of the Zingers found littering the maps. This battle had DK picking up the delicate Vine Barrels, avoiding attacks, and then lobbing them at her for massive damage.



REALLY GNAWTY

★ Fought in a similar fashion to his brethren, Very Gnawty, this oversized rat caused chaos by constantly leaping above DK and his young protégée. The fourth boss, found in the Gorilla Glacier, was always a nightmare, forcing players to expertly time attacks.

close with *Uniracers* earlier that year, but had fallen short of rendering out the entire world. 22 man-years, six SGI workstations and one XL Super Computer – as Nintendo took great pride in announcing – built what is essentially a stunning 3D title confined to 32 megabits of cartridge storage. Impressively, it didn't require a new 32-bit machine or a CD-Rom system to play either. The games industry had never seen anything like it.

■■■ It's a game that stands the test of time, far better than many of the era. It survives on more than nostalgia factor – on its excellent, fundamental pillars of design. *Donkey Kong Country* was a fast and fluid platformer, with challenge and treasures waiting for those willing to slow down for repeat journeys through the stunning vistas of Donkey Kong Island. The music is still a technical marvel, as Rare's in-house composer David Wise made excellent use of the SNES's limited sound chip, restricted by eight-channels and the capacity to play limited samples; everything was hand-coded to save memory, midi was out of the question. The game was a true achievement.

But still, over two decades later, we come back to the graphics. Rare's gamble with Alias and SGI technology led to the advent of a process called 'Advanced Computer Modelling' – it paid huge dividends. To get that pseudo 3D graphical style – and without any additional hardware expansions – required the developers to pre-render all graphical work in ray-traced 3D before porting it to the SNES as 2D sprites and background tiles. This, again, saved memory, allowing the team the space to create the slick animations for which the game is still renowned. The experiments with SGI equipment gave Rare the opportunity to produce scanline tricks, pushing the maximum on-screen colours up from 256 to a staggering 32,768; the result is a vibrant adventure that immediately captured the attention of anybody that saw it in motion.

It was a success, of course, and a huge one at that. *Donkey Kong Country* was a game changer, but not for its genre – that was, after all, Mario's area of expertise – but for the SNES itself. The game would go on to sell 9 million copies, making it the second bestselling game on the system. Its rendered 3D models were convincing enough to trick gamers into thinking the SNES could actually run full 3D games in real-time, keeping the console alive as the PlayStation and Saturn arrived with their obviously superior technological potential. The full-bodied design of Donkey Kong himself would become the standard for use across all future Nintendo games featuring him.

Perhaps most impressively, *Donkey Kong Country* confirmed what everybody in the industry already suspected, that the staff at Rare were some of the most gifted designers and developers available. They would, of course, go on to create *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Goldeneye 007*, *Perfect Dark* and *Diddy Kong Racing* (not to mention many more) while acting as a second-party developer for Nintendo, all the while pushing its technical excellence in artistry, design and music composition. For all of Rare's achievements, everything comes back to *Donkey Kong Country*, a game born out of a desire to tread the cutting-edge. That's how it will be forever remembered.

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY WAS ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES TO USE PRE-RENDERED 3D GRAPHICS

KEY FACTS

- Do you remember Cranky Kong, the rambling grandfather that always complains about DK? Well, as it should happen, that is actually the original Donkey Kong, the one Mario faced off against over Pauline, though his defeat pushed him into retirement.
- *Donkey Kong Country* is one of the best selling SNES games of all time. Thanks to its stunning visuals and a (quite frankly) ridiculous marketing campaign, it went on to ship 9 million copies. Its incredible success helped inspire the direction of many a Nintendo franchise.

GAME CHANGERS

THE BEST DONKEY KONG GAMES

WITH A LONG AND WILD HISTORY, THESE ARE SOME OF OUR FAVOURITE GAMES TO FEATURE DK AND HIS ARRAY OF FAMILY MEMBERS



DONKEY KONG 64

Donkey Kong 64 may not have been as successful as *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* or *Super Mario 64* with regard to the conversion to full 3D, but this under-appreciated gem not only brought a huge open world to the fore, but it also delivered one of the most wonderfully stupid videogame tunes in the form of the *Donkey Kong Rap*. Say what you will about the game, but that awkwardly rhyming track will forever stand the test of time.



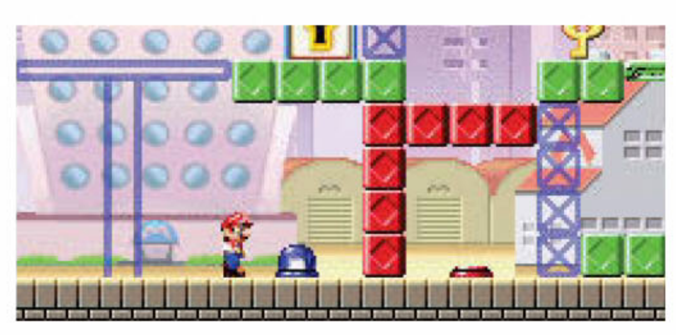
DONKEY KONGA

Nintendo is known for its weird games and unconventional peripherals, but *Donkey Konga* may have introduced one of our favourites. It came packaged with a conga drum peripheral, a bongo of sorts, and threw DK into a rhythm game where you'd have to tap, slap and clap along with a variety of famous Nintendo tunes and pop-culture tracks. It was silly, unconventional and still stands as one of the most bizarre releases available on GameCube.



DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

■ *Donkey Konga* was only Nintendo's most bizarre title until *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat* landed. Nintendo innovation at its purest, the company was eager to keep the bongo smashing dream alive and so we received this quirky platformer. *Jungle Beat* was a familiar Donkey Kong adventure that used the conga drum to guide DK across beautiful levels. The aim wasn't simply to reach the end of a level, but to score as many successful beats along the way as possible.



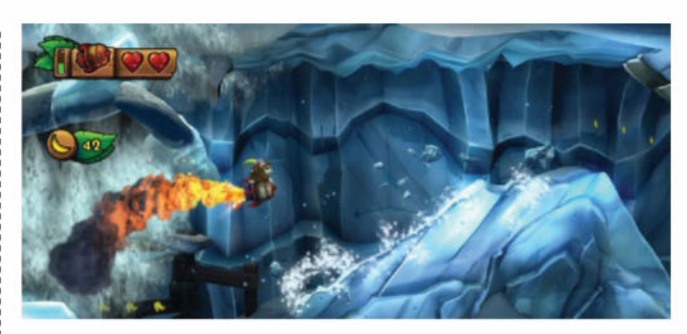
MARIO VS DONKEY KONG

■ Some rivalries just never die. Mario and Donkey Kong once again found themselves tangled in competition on the Game Boy Advance, essentially working as an updated exploration of the gameplay presented in the original *Donkey Kong*. Bringing a unique combination of puzzles and platforming together, it was the perfect fit for the handheld console; pitting Mario against his old nemesis was as enjoyable as ever, even if hunting for those keys became an eventual chore.



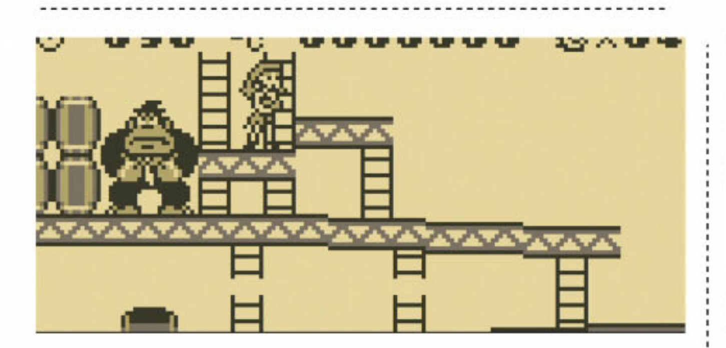
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY'S KONG QUEST

■ Largely considered one of the best games on the SNES, *Diddy's Kong Quest* was a fantastic sequel to the 1994 release. Even with the technologically superior Saturn and PlayStation on the shelves, the use of Rare's innovative pre-rendered 3D imagery means this one was still a stunner, in spite of the limited power of the SNES.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY: TROPICAL FREEZE

■ While many were disappointed Retro Studios had moved away from developing *Metroid Prime* games, the studio found confident footing picking up where Rare left off with the *Country* games. *Tropical Freeze* is often overlooked, such is the problem of launching a Wii U exclusive, but the execution was near flawless.



DONKEY KONG

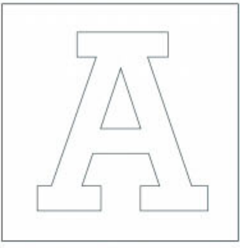
■ One of the most important videogames in history, this was the one that first introduced the basic concept of Jump Man and Donkey Kong to the playing public. Dragging Nintendo out of the playing card business and into the world of arcade gaming, *Donkey Kong*'s simple but engaging action put the company – and creator Shigeru Miyamoto – on the map. Where would we be today without one ape's attempt to kidnap Pauline from a guy with a penchant for jumping over barrels?

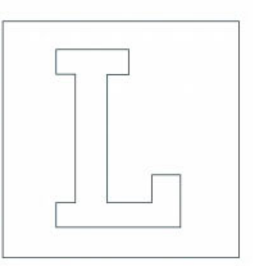
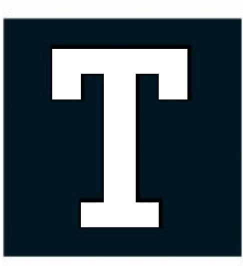


DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

■ *Donkey Kong Country* set the template for every major *Donkey Kong* game to follow. Rare introduced a wide cast of heroes and villains, not to mention platforming staples such as the barrel cannons and DK barrels. A revolutionary game for the SNES, this still stands today – over two decades later – as one of the finest and most influential games available on the 16-bit console. And that's why we consider it to be a true game changer for the industry.

THE



XBOX ONE S: GEARS OF WAR 4 LIMITED EDITION

MANUFACTURER: **MICROSOFT** PRICE: **£399.99**

LIMITED EDITION CONSOLES have a tendency to go either way. While some can look luxurious and well deserving of a spot under your television, others can simply look cheap and completely out of place – there is, after all, a fine line between good and gaudy.

Thankfully, Microsoft has absolutely nailed the *Gears Of War* aesthetic when it comes to this limited edition 2TB Xbox One S, as the console boasts a subtle and well-engineered design. It's sleek, small and lighter than the regular Xbox One, sporting a rather attractive battle-weathered red colour theme. Claw marks can be found etched into the body of the machine – as if this thing is so sought after The Swarm have *literally* been trying to get their paws onto it, which was a nice touch, as is the faded Phoenix Omen burned into the side grating.

As ever, the Xbox One S is a beautiful device and this *Gears*-themed design only enhances it. That, however, shouldn't be the only thing that pushes you towards this smaller and quieter device. As you might imagine, it still provides little extra functionality to those that don't currently own a 4K, HDR-ready TV. If you have already upgraded, you'll find that the Xbox One S is still one of the cheapest 4K media players on the market – coming equipped with a 4K Blu-ray player – and, yes, games such as *Gears Of War 4* really do benefit from HDR lighting support. But as with the vanilla model of the system, if you don't own a relevant TV, it's nothing more than a vanity item.
www.microsoftstore.com

VERDICT 9/10

GAMING CLOTHING



BALAMB GRIEVERS - SLEEVELESS HOODIE

Showcase your SeeD credentials with this hoodie, coming in a gunblade grey colour and baggy fit. Best paired with a baseball tee to get the ultimate streetwear-meets-*FFVIII* combination going.
www.gametee.co.uk



TRI PIXEL POCKET TEE

Honour the Hero Of Time with this subtle *Legend Of Zelda* tee. The bulk of the shirt is comfortable 150gsm combed cotton for a comfy fit, but the pocket comes equipped with a gorgeous Triforce illustration.
www.gametee.co.uk



THE REAPER - GAMING TAROT TEE

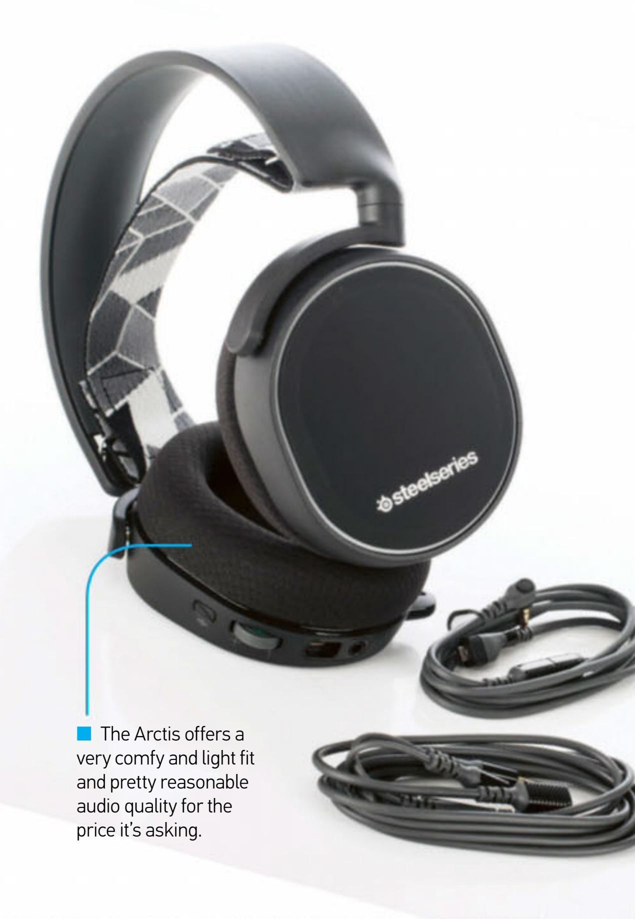
Inspired by tarot and illustrated by artist AJ Hateley, the Reaper tee is just one in a line of stunning gaming-related shirts. This one echoing the spookiness of Manny Calavera, is our favourite.
www.gametee.co.uk

STEELSERIES ARCTIS 3

SOLD BY: **STEELSERIES** PRICE: **£89.99**

AS GREAT AS most gaming headsets are, they can have a tendency to look a little like childlike, big monstrous pieces of plastic with the components thrust into huge cans. But not the Arctis 3, the latest set from SteelSeries. This headset comes equipped with a purposefully subtle and classy design without compromising on quality, as the Arctis boasts a strong and defined virtual 7.1 surround sound with that clear SteelSeries signature clarity throughout.

The understated design of the headset is easy to fall based on how comfortable it is, you'll really feel the benefit of the Arctis 3 after a lengthy session of *Battlefield 1* or *Titanfall 2*. In fact, these headphones thrive in the multiplayer arena, with a sumptuously-rich sound across the entire spectrum really working hard to help you pick out every little detail around you. If we had any complaints, it would be that the virtual 7.1 surround and noise-cancelling software for the adjustable microphone is locked behind the need to have a SteelSeries account, though this can be immediately mitigated by ample use of the 'junk mail' filter in your email account. Overall though, the Arctis 3 is an incredibly good-looking, great-sounding, headset that acts as a fine alternative to Corsair's Void RGB offering at a similar price.
www.steelseries.com



The Arctis offers a very comfy and light fit and pretty reasonable audio quality for the price it's asking.



Fnatic has got a bunch of new peripherals launching at the moment, extending its brand.

This isn't as flashy as some gaming mice you might have encountered, but its accuracy cannot be questioned.

FNATIC CLUTCH G1 OPTICAL GAMING MOUSE

SOLD BY: **FNATIC** PRICE: **€59.99**

WHEN A DEVICE arrives sporting the Fnatic branding, you immediately have a few expectations: responsiveness, competitive and powerful. That's because the brand has built itself a fine reputation as one of the best eSports teams across games such as *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* and *League Of Legends* all around the globe. And now here the company has arrived with a line of its own kit, and the Clutch G1 stands above the rest.

Designed to be used in competitive eSports, Fnatic players have designed this peripheral to be the only mouse they ever need, and it shows. A Pixart 3310 optical sensor, 130 IPS tracking speed and a max acceleration of 30G makes this one versatile little piece of equipment. It's a functional device that competes directly with the Razer Mamba or SteelSeries Rival, let down by a flat, uninspired design and software that can be a little cumbersome to use from time to time. Still, if you're looking to up your game in FPS games such as *Overwatch* and *CS:GO*, there's very little chance you'll find yourself disappointed with this purchase.
www.shop.fnatic.com







HALO MYTHOS: A GUIDE TO THE STORY OF HALO

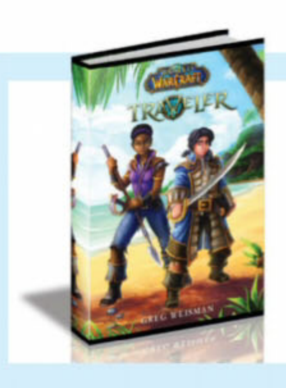
PUBLISHER: **EGMONT**

SUCCESS, ON THE scale of *Halo* at least, can never be anticipated. Now, a decade later, the franchise has spiralled wildly out of control, transforming itself into one of the largest and most popular science-fiction universes in the world. As that was never planned, there are a handful of gaps in the timeline that still cause debate between fans to this day. That's why there's a huge desire for a book like *Halo Mythos*; an official and comprehensive guide to the Halo universe written in collaboration with 343 Industries.

This beautiful coffee table book serves as the first time that the entirety of the *Halo* canon can be found collected together. We aren't just talking the five mainline games either, this compendium collects everything – the wider universe material fleshed out in the books, comics, live-action and animated entertainment – and fits it into a timeline that's easy to grasp. We're talking a million years of *Halo* story here folks, from the earliest days of the Forerunners, Humanity's battles against the Flood and Covenant, up to the recent events of *Halo 5*.

Better still, *Halo Mythos* also includes 50 specially-commissioned full-colour paintings, showcasing the vehicles, weapons and ships from a group of illustrators including Jean-Sébastien Rossbach, Leonid Kozienko, Benjamin Carré, Isaac Hannaford, not to mention 343's internal art team, too. Bungie and Microsoft may not have planned for *Halo* to be the success that it is, but this serves as one of the best celebrations of what is has become.

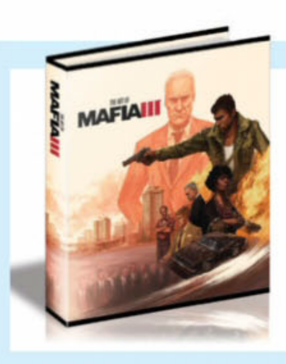
www.microsoftstore.com



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: TRAVELLER

This marks the first title in a new series of *World Of Warcraft* inspired titles for children aged 8-12. In this instance it's a story about a young boy who joins estranged father on a seafaring adventure. The book includes new illustrations from Blizzard's art team.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



THE ART OF MAFIA III

Say what you will about *Mafia III*, but Hanger 13 provided one of the most visually-impressive games of the generation. The studio's art director Dave Smith takes you behind-the-scenes to look at the construction of New Bordeaux through striking pieces of concept art and location shots.

www.forbiddenplanet.com



ART FOR THE PLAYERS

How long did you really think it was going to be before the colouring book craze reached the world of videogames? Frankly we thought it would be sooner than this. PlayStation has endorsed this official colouring book including illustrations of some of its most famous heroes and brands.

www.forbiddenplanet.com





Future Publishing Ltd
Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Web: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
www.greatdigitalmags.com
www.futureplc.com

Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
jonathan.gordon@futurenet.com
☎ 01202 586213
Art Editor **Andy Salter**
Features Editor **Josh West**
Editor In Chief **Dave Harfield**
Senior Art Editor **Stephen Williams**
Photographer **James Sheppard**

Contributors
Luke Albigés Adam Barnes, James Churchill, David Crookes, Callie Green, Rebecca Greig, Ross Hamilton, Tim Henderson, Steve Holmes, Darran Jones, Carrie Mok, Tom Regan, Dominic Reseigh-Lincoln, John Robertson, Drew Sleep

Cover images
Nintendo Switch © 2016 Nintendo. The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild © 2016 Nintendo. All rights reserved.

Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request.
Head of Sales **Hang Deretz**
☎ 01202 586442
hang.deretz@futurenet.com
Account Manager **Anthony Godsell**
anthony.godsell@futurenet.com

International
Games™ is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities.
Head of International Licensing **Cathy Blackman**
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586401
cathy.blackman@futurenet.com

Subscriptions
For all subscription enquiries:
gamestm@servicehelpline.co.uk
☎ 0844 848 8429
☎ Overseas +44 (0)1795 592 864
www.imaginesubs.co.uk
Head of subscriptions **Sharon Todd**

Circulation
Circulation Director **Darren Pearce**
☎ 01202 586200

Production
Production Director **Jane Hawkins**
☎ 01202 586200

Management
Finance & Operations Director **Marco Peroni**
Creative Director **Aaron Asadi**
Editorial Director **Ross Andrews**

Printing & Distribution
Printed by Southernprint Ltd, 17-21 Factory Road, Upton Industrial Estate, Poole, Dorset, BH16 5SN

Distributed in the UK, Eire & the Rest of the World by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
☎ 0203 787 9060 www.marketforce.co.uk

Distributed in Australia by Gordon & Gotch Australia Pty Ltd, 26 Rodborough Road, Frenchs Forest, New South Wales 2086
☎ + 61 2 9972 8800 www.gordongotch.com.au

ISSN 1478-5889





Future is an award-winning international media group and leading digital business. We reach more than 57 million international consumers a month and create world-class content and advertising solutions for passionate consumers online, on tablet & smartphone and in print.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR).
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Whew, Superness is tiring
Keep reading! You never know what's gonna shake loose in games™ 182 on sale 29 December

